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Subject: News Clips

Region 2 News Clips

[Toxic Secrets: NJ denies controversial groundwater cleanup plan in Pompton Lakes](#) (NORTH JERSEY; November 30, 2018)

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The pro women's soccer team co-owned by Gov. Phil Murphy will have to find its new home elsewhere.

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[EPA: Gowanus Canal is cleaner than it has been in 150 years](#) (Brooklyn Paper; November 29, 2018)

It's a bright spot for Brooklyn's Nautical Purgatory!

[Dutchess County Exec To EPA: Hudson River PCB Cleanup Is Incomplete](#) (WAMC NEWS; November 28, 2018)

The Dutchess County executive is calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to refrain from deeming the upper Hudson River PCB cleanup project complete. General Electric maintains it has done its job.

US VIRGIN ISLANDS / PUERTO RICO

[They continue attending powerful fire in recycling plant in Carolina](#) (METRO.PR – Google (Translate English); November 29, 2018)

The commissioner of the Bureau of the Fire Department of the Department of Public Safety (DSP), Alberto Cruz Albarrán, reported that both the negotiated he leads, the Bureau for Emergency Management and Disaster Management (NMEAD) and resources of the municipality of Carolina continue attending the fire that broke out since Wednesday afternoon at the JJW Metal recycling plant.

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Region 2 News

NORTH JERSEY

[Toxic Secrets: NJ denies controversial groundwater cleanup plan in Pompton Lakes](#)

By Scott Fallon

November 30, 2018

State officials have denied a controversial plan to clean contaminated groundwater that sits under a Pompton Lakes neighborhood, saying the project is not needed because levels of cancer-causing chemicals from a former DuPont munitions plant are already decreasing.

In a letter sent this week to a DuPont spinoff company, Chemours, the state Department of Environmental Protection said it would not approve a permit for hydraulic surcharging — a process in which clean water would be pumped into the polluted water beneath 450 homes to dilute the contamination, but not remove it.

The plan was forcefully opposed by more than 150 residents who attended a public hearing on the project more than a year ago. They worried that pumping more water into the ground would cause the water table to rise, flooding their basements with water laced with cancer-causing solvents.

Helen Martens, a 40-year resident of the neighborhood, said Thursday that she was happy the DEP denied the permit, but wants the agency to do more than just wait for the contamination to naturally break down.

"Everyone was afraid of this plan so it's good news it's being stopped," Martens said. "It doesn't really help us in any way, either. The contamination is still there."

Robin Ollis-Stemple, a spokeswoman for Chemours, said in a statement that the company "will continue to monitor and evaluate the groundwater and work with the NJDEP to provide a solution that is protective of the community and the environment."

Earlier this year, an investigation by NorthJersey.com and the USA TODAY Network New Jersey showed that DuPont had worked since the 1980s to downplay the extent of contamination in the neighborhood and then spent years refusing to test homes while residents were being exposed to toxic fumes.

The pollution dates back decades to when DuPont workers disposed of solvents used to clean machine parts by dumping them into lagoons on the company's 600-acre campus in Pompton Lakes. The plant closed in 1994 after almost a century of manufacturing munitions. The solvents migrated into groundwater under an adjacent neighborhood south of the plant.

In 2008, officials announced that the solvents were vaporizing up through the soil into some basements. The neighborhood has elevated levels of lymphoma and kidney cancer. More than 300 residents have had ventilation systems installed in their homes.

DuPont signed an agreement with DEP in 1988 to clean the groundwater beneath the neighborhood, but no cleanup plan has been approved despite multiple pilot tests that did not significantly reduce contamination levels.



Aerial photo of the Pompton Lakes neighborhood that sits above a plume of contaminated groundwater, with the former DuPont munitions site in the background, taken in January 2010. (Photo: File Photo/NorthJersey.com)

DEP Commissioner Catherine McCabe said in August that she didn't see the need for a major change in the way her agency is dealing with the contamination because concentrations of pollution have decreased in the shallow part of the aquifer.

DuPont installed a pump-and-treat system in 1998 to capture groundwater before it leaves the DuPont site, with a goal of keeping even more contamination from spreading into the neighborhood.

McCabe said she was not in favor of placing similar pump-and-treat systems in the neighborhood as some residents have requested, saying it was better to treat the contamination at the source.

Cheryl Rubino, who grew up in the neighborhood and whose mother still lives there, said she wants the DEP to be more aggressive now that the Chemours plan is off the table.



Project Director David Epps explains the rules application before public comment at the hearing. In the front row wearing a surgical mask is Richard Orefice, a 26 year old man and Pompton Lakes resident since 2000. He is suffering from lymphoma. The hearing was held to discuss a plan by DuPont to pump clean water into a polluted aquifer that has sat for decades under a neighborhood with high cancer rates. (Photo: Chris Pedota/NorthJersey.com)

"The mere fact that they think it's getting better shows that they're not serious about this contamination," she said.

Rubino said she was elated that Chemours would not be allowed to move forward with the project.

"They never put protections into place for the residents," Rubino said. "We want it cleaned up, but we want it cleaned up in the right way."

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NJ.COM

[Now Murphy's soccer team won't relocate to land where trees could be chopped down](#)

By Brent Johnson

November 30, 2018

The pro women's soccer team co-owned by Gov. Phil Murphy will have to find its new home elsewhere.

Sky Blue FC is pulling its support of a proposed Ocean County sports complex that may have housed its new stadium -- just hours after media reports in which environmentalists voiced outrage, especially over how developers plan to cut down thousands of trees, NJ Advance Media has confirmed.

"Due to environmental concerns that have been brought to our attention, Sky Blue FC is withdrawing our support for the Trophy Park project application," Tony Novo, the team's general manager, said in a statement late Thursday night.

A spokesman for Murphy deferred comment to Sky Blue.

Multiple news outlets reported earlier Thursday that SkyBlue is listed as a partner in Trophy Park, a 200-acre site proposed for a tract of land in Jackson near Six Flags Great Adventure amusement park.

Developer Allen Nau told NJ Advance Media on Thursday afternoon the Tinton Falls-based team was in "tentative" talks to rent space at the 200-acre site to house its headquarters, use the facilities for practice, and play its home games at the complex's 6,000-seat stadium.

For SkyBlue, it would have been a step up. The team was the subject of reports this summer describing dismal living and working conditions for players. It currently plays home games at Rutgers University in Piscataway.

Murphy -- who co-owns the team with Steven Temares, the CEO of Bed, Bath & Beyond -- promised in July the "unacceptable" conditions would be fixed.



But environmentalists said Trophy Park would be located in an environmentally sensitive area along Prospertown Lake.

They said the project would not only cause trees to be razed but would also lead to more traffic and runoff from cars, as well as threatened the endangered species and wetlands nearby.

They were also bothered that Murphy, a Democrat, would be involved after vowing to help the environment in New Jersey.

Plus, the Trophy Park proposal comes a few years after environmental groups sued Great Adventure over a plan to cut down 19,000 trees to build a 90-acre solar farm. The three-year legal fight ended with clearing only 40 acres of trees.

Meanwhile, another sports complex is set to go up near Great Adventure this year: Adventure Crossing, which will include a three-acre sports dome and two hotels.

Clean Water Action, the lead plaintiff in the Great Adventure lawsuit, applauded Sky Blue's decision to not join Trophy Park.

"Clearcutting Pinelands forest for a large active recreational complex is worse than for a solar project especially when there's a similar sportsplex being built next door and so many already developed areas in Sky Blue's home state in need of redevelopment," Amy Goldsmith, the New Jersey director of the group, said in a statement. "The core contiguous forest of the Pinelands should be sacrosanct."

Nau, Trophy Park's developer, stressed Thursday that Murphy would only have been a "tenant" at Trophy Park.

"I just felt because we're gonna have all these sports going there, to have a professional sports team there would be good," Nau said. "And they were looking for a place."

Novo said in a statement Thursday afternoon that Sky Blue did not have "any formal agreement" with the project, though "we support it."

He added the team would be interested in any complex built by "any developer that suits our facility needs."

"We are strongly committed to ensuring Sky Blue FC players and fans have access to first-class facilities befitting their needs," Novo said.

Trophy Park itself may still be built without Sky Blue. A public hearing about the project is set for Monday night before Jackson's planning board.

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NEW YORK DAILY

Judge who rejected NYCHA monitor deal approves much narrower plan addressing only toxic mold

By Greg B. Smith

November 29, 2018

The judge who rejected a proposed plan to impose a federal monitor to handle NYCHA's many problems Thursday gave thumbs up to a much narrower plan that focuses only on one persistent issue – toxic mold.

Manhattan Federal Judge William Pauley recently shot down a consent decree NYCHA and Mayor de Blasio signed with federal prosecutors calling for the imposition of a federal monitor to oversee the authority's compliance with health and safety rules.

The monitor would have held sway over the troubled authority's handling of a long list of issues, including lead paint removal, busted elevators, and the infestation of mold in public apartments.

On Thursday he chose to sign off on a related but much narrower agreement aimed at addressing only the issue of mold. He has ordered NYCHA and the federal prosecutors to come up with a new broader plan within the next two weeks.

In an 11-page ruling, Judge Pauley approved a modified plan to deal with the mold present in apartments where tenants have asthma. That agreement grew out of a related lawsuit *Baez v. NYCHA* originally settled by Mayor Bloomberg in December 2013.

"Ultimately these modifications will better serve the underlying goals of the Consent decree of ensuring that NYCHA effectively remediates mold in its apartments," he wrote.

The suit, brought by Metro Industrial Area Foundation, a housing advocacy non-profit, charged NYCHA with violating the Americans with Disabilities Act by failing to remove mold from apartments housing tenants with respiratory issues such as asthma.

In that agreement the Housing Authority put forth a plan to aggressively combat this problem, including cleaning up mold in simpler cases within seven days and more complex cases within 15.

Almost immediately that effort failed, with NYCHA's mold team consistently missing deadlines or performing inadequate clean-up that allowed the mold to return soon after. Judge Pauley then appointed a special master to speed things up, but the turnaround never arrived.

In April Metro IAF, represented by the National Center for Law & Economic Justice, and NYCHA agreed to a new more aggressive plan, but Pauley rejected it as inadequate. NYCHA and the group went back the drawing board and in July presented their latest plan to the judge.

On Thursday Pauley approved it, noting that the revised plan imposes a strict timeline for NYCHA to adopt new mold cleanup tactics, prove they've made a "best effort" to hit the seven- and 15-day cleanup deadlines, and includes a requirement that NYCHA must prevent a recurrence of mold in apartment's they claim are clean.

The newly approved plan also includes appointment of a "mold specialist," and a data analyst and an ombudsman to address tenant complaints about cleanups — jobs that are expected to cost NYCHA up to \$500,000 a year. And for the first time it extends the consent decree indefinitely.

Judge Pauley found the new plan "is suitably tailored to NYCHA's worsening mold reoccurrence rate and NYCHA's excuse that the consent decree did not include any formal obligation to address mold reoccurrence."

"We are deeply gratified that Judge Pauley ruled in favor of our revised consent decree," said Rev. Getulio Cruz, Pastor of Monte Sion Christian Church on the Lower East Side and a Metro IAF leader. He said "strong independent oversight" by the new ombudsman "will now be put in place will mean that public housing tenants in my congregation and all throughout New York will have a fighting chance of living in mold-free apartments."

How this agreement effects the broader deal with the U.S. Attorney remains to be seen. In the last two weeks, the prosecutors, the city and NYCHA have been trying to hammer out a new plan acceptable to the judge. They're set to present their latest offer Dec. 14.

On Wednesday, U.S. Attorney Berman declined to weigh in on the mold agreement.

NYCHA's interim Chairman Stanley Brezenoff praised Pauley's approval on the mold issue, stating, "Today's decision represents important progress in our mold remediation and abatement efforts."

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NEW YORK UPSTATE

[Paper mill fined \\$125,000 for unlawful waste water discharges in Adirondack river](#)

By David Figura

November 29, 2018

SYRACUSE, N.Y -- The owner of an Adirondack paper mill was fined \$125,000 today in U.S. federal court for negligently dumping illegal waste water into a popular river.

APC Paper Group of New York, which operates a paper mill in Norfolk, N.Y. in St. Lawrence County, pleaded guilty to "negligently discharging wastewater into the Raquette River between 2013 and 2015 in violation of the Clean Water Act." The signed plea agreement submitted and accepted by U.S. Magistrate Judge David E Peebles resulted in the fine and the company agreeing to an "environmental compliance plan requiring specific actions until Jan. 1, 2020.

According to a press release from the U.S. Attorney's office, "in pleading guilty, APC admitted to repeatedly violating the daily maximum and monthly average limits of bio-chemical oxygen demand (BOD) in its waste water in its discharges into the river."

The bio-chemical oxygen demand is the amount of dissolved oxygen in the water necessary for microorganisms in the water to break down organic material. BOD levels also provide an index for measuring the effect discharged wastewater will have on a body of fresh water receiving it.

In this case, the paper mill's Clean Water Act permit restricted the amount of BOD the company could discharge on a daily and monthly basis.

In addition, the company admitted in court that a former employee, Michael Ward, who pleaded guilty to similar criminal charges was aware of the bad discharges, failed to report them to his superiors and prepared "false and fraudulent monthly reports that were submitted to the DEC." The company stated, as part of its plea, that it failed to "meaningfully" supervise Ward to verify the accuracy of his reports.

The case was investigated by the United States Attorney's office (North District) and the DEC. It was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Michael F. Perry.

Stretching from Piercefield to its confluence with the St Lawrence River east of Massena, the lower Raquette River, according to the DEC, "offers a pleasurable as well as varied outdoor experience for both the most ardent and the novice outdoor enthusiast. From white water canoeing to paddling and fishing on any number of reservoirs, the Raquette has something for everyone."

"With the exception of the last 2.2 miles of river near Massena, which lies in Franklin County, the lower Raquette is located entirely within St Lawrence County."

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WSHU

[Environmental Groups Hopeful For Action On Plum Island](#)

November 29, 2018

Environmental advocates from Connecticut and New York were in Washington, D.C., Wednesday to lobby Congress on several issues related to Long Island Sound. They hoped to meet with four U.S. senators and eight to ten representatives.

Adrienne Esposito, with Citizens Campaign for the Environment, said she's optimistic that issues like Plum Island can be put back on the congressional agenda. The government owns the island and plans to sell it. Environmental groups have tried to get Congress to block the sale, but a bill to do so has been stalled in the Senate since last year.

"We want to preserve Plum Island. It is a beautiful area that should be preserved forever and not be sold off to the highest bidder to become another condo complex and golf course and whatever. These are issues that the public supports. We had the biggest public turnout in the last ten years come out in November. And it shows that the public's watching and that the public cares." Esposito said.

Advocates are also asking Congress for an extra \$8 million in the next federal budget for a program to restore habitats and improve water quality on the sound.

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PRESS OF ATLANTIC CITY

[Wharton State Forest roads flooded, rivers closed to recreation](#)

By Michelle Brunetti

November 29, 2018



Unimproved roads within Wharton State Forest are impassable due to November's heavy rains, and all access points for the Batsto, Mullica, Oswego, and Wading rivers are closed due to hazardous conditions, the state said Thursday.

Many of the roads have extensive ponding or washouts, the New Jersey State Park Service said. The forest is in the Pinelands, which is an area with a naturally high water table.

Some bridges are completely covered by swollen rivers and will be assessed as floodwaters recede, officials said.

The nearly 123,000-acre forest includes parts of Atlantic, Burlington and Camden counties and has hundreds of miles of sand roads popular for motorized vehicle use. Its rivers are used for canoeing and kayaking.

Environmentalists have complained that motorized vehicles have caused extensive damage by riding off-road illegally, and the state has taken steps to educate visitors to stay on roads. It has also enlisted the help of the motor community in helping with cleanups and other attempts at remediation.

The Park Service recommends visitors postpone visits to avoid getting stuck, to never drive through high water, and to not use the rivers for recreation until floodwaters recede.

Backcountry camping, hiking, horseback riding, and other trail-related activities may be affected by flooding and limited access. Visitors are advised to call ahead for the latest information on conditions at 609-561-0024.

November rainfall has deluged Wharton with nearly a foot of rain. Located in the Pinelands National Reserve, it also has an extensive network of streams and wetlands.

Batsto Village, the preserved former bog iron and glassmaking center, is open. The Atsion Recreation Area is closed for the season.

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NJ SPOTLIGHT

[Cold Snap Puts Sea Turtles at Risk of Washing Up on NJ Beaches](#)

By WHYY News Online

November 29, 2018



Marine wildlife experts say that the recent cold snap has placed migrating sea turtles at risk, and that some of the species could wash up on New Jersey beaches.

But the experts also warn beachgoers not to assume that a turtle they find on the beach is dead, as some could actually just be “cold-stunned.”

The cold-blooded animals, suited for water temperatures between 75 degrees and 85 degrees, are susceptible to being stunned in cold water as they migrate south before winter sets in.

The nonprofit Marine Mammal Stranding Center in Brigantine has received reports of what appears to be frozen sea turtles along New Jersey beaches. The center is urging beachcombers to contact them if they encounter any animals that appear to be dead so that experts can respond and provide emergency care, if warranted.

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BROOKLYN PAPER

[EPA: Gowanus Canal is cleaner than it has been in 150 years](#)

By Julianne Cuba

November 29, 2018



Done!: The Environmental Protection Agency this month completed its pilot dredging-and-capping program inside the Gowanus Canal's Fourth Street Turning Basin.

It's a bright spot for Brooklyn's Nautical Purgatory!

A section of the fetid Gowanus Canal is now cleaner than it has been in more than a century, after workers this month finally wrapped a pilot dredging-and-capping program as part of the channel's federally led cleanup.

The program in the Fourth Street Turning Basin kicked off more than a year ago, in October of 2017, and finished more than six months after its initial April 2018 deadline — but the delay is a small price to pay for finally removing some of the toxic “black mayonnaise” from the canal's floor, according to the man leading the scrub.

“It's the first time that a portion of the canal has a clean bottom in 150 years — let's give it an applause,” Environmental Protection Agency project manager Christos Tsiamis told local members of the Gowanus Community Advisory Group at a Tuesday meeting.

Last December, the program, one of the first phases of the channel's slow-going cleanse, got stuck in the muck weeks after it began, when workers created cracks in canal-adjacent land — including the ground below the pedestrian promenade outside Third Street's Whole Foods — while using massive machines to drive new protective bulkheads into the waterway's banks.

That setback stalled the job until March, when the Feds resumed their work digging up the noxious sediment from the canal's bottom, which they made deeper before capping it to prevent other harmful chemicals from seeping in.

And now that it's done, Tsiamis said the leaders of the cleanse know how to avoid similar problems as they move forward with the scrub.

“We have drawn our conclusions on what means and methods we are going to use in order to clean up the canal properly,” he said.

Earlier this year, Tsiamis told locals there was no end in sight for the Gowanus Canal's cleanup, which kicked off in 2016 with an initial completion year of 2022.

But officials now believe by spring they'll be able to start counting down to the end of cleanse in months, not years, almost a decade after the Feds declared it a Superfund site in 2010.

“By spring, we will be able to start the countdown of the cleanup in months, not in years,” he said.

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WAMC NEWS

[Dutchess County Exec To EPA: Hudson River PCB Cleanup Is Incomplete](#)

By Allison Dunne

November 29, 2018



The Dutchess County executive is calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to refrain from deeming the upper Hudson River PCB cleanup project complete. General Electric maintains it has done its job.

Republican County Executive Marc Molinaro wrote to EPA Regional Administrator Pete Lopez, asking EPA to refrain from issuing a Certificate of Completion for General Electric's PCB cleanup project along a 40-mile stretch of the upper Hudson River.

"Our message, my message is consistent — we get one opportunity to ensure that the Hudson River is adequately cleaned, that the project that's been under way for a number of years provides for appropriate protection of the environment, the local economy and ensures that both communities and residents who live in the Hudson Valley today and future generations know that we held this to the highest standard and that we've ensured that the project is done, and that the Hudson River is as greatly as possible as clean as possible," Molinaro says.

General Electric removed 2.65 million cubic yards of contaminated sediment through 2015. The EPA, in its second review of the cleanup of PCBs from the upper Hudson River, said that the \$1.7 billion, six-year cleanup of the Superfund site is working, and will accomplish its long-term goal of protecting human health and the environment.

Outgoing New York state Department of Environmental Commissioner Basil Seggos:

"It would be reckless for the EPA to issue a Certificate of Completion," Seggos says.

"Our own data, data that we've shared extensively with the EPA and discussed with them conclusively proves that the job is far from done. So we intend to use all of our legal tools available to ensure the EPA doesn't let GE off the hook. And anything less than that would be a betrayal of the river and its communities."

A spokeswoman says EPA has not yet made a decision regarding GE's request for Certification of Completion of Remedial Action or the Five-Year Review. She says the agency is considering County Executive Molinaro's input, along with the input and recommendations of other stakeholders, and hopes to come to some conclusions in the coming months. Meantime, there was an expectation around this time last year that EPA might issue a Certificate of Completion, but EPA decided to further study the matter and evaluate sediment samples. Mark Behan is GE spokesman.

"The Certificate of Completion really just addresses the work that was required for the dredging project and that work has been completed in full and completed successfully," Behan says.

Seggos says that EPA disregarded the DEC's request to conduct additional sampling so DEC began sampling in June 2017. He says DEC collected more than 1,600 samples to assess the levels of surface sediment contamination in the upper Hudson River and confirmed that there are significantly greater amounts of PCBs in the Hudson River than EPA anticipated there would be at the end of the dredging project. Seggos says that if allowed to remain, these sediments will delay the long-term reduction of fish PCB concentrations, prolonging risks to human health and the environment. The EPA spokeswoman describes her agency as still intensely engaged with state partners, including the review of surface sediment data collected in 2017. Meanwhile, Molinaro expects EPA will issue its decision by the end of the year.

"If a Certificate of Completion is issued, there will absolutely be, not only significant disapproval, but steps taken to hold the EPA accountable. And what form that takes, we'll certainly discuss as time goes on," says Molinaro. "But, again, I

think that the EPA has a chance now to ensure that we do everything possible to ensure that this cleanup adequately meets the standards set by the EPA, uses data collected by New York state DEC and others and establishes for future generations a legacy of stewardship.”

Again, GE’s Behan.

“Well, we believe a Certificate of Completion should be issued because it’s very clear that GE has met or exceeded all of its obligations on the Hudson, and has completed the project and the project succeeded in meeting its goals,” says Behan.

It was in January of this year that the EPA announced it would work with the DEC to evaluate the sediment samples taken by DEC in 2017 from the upper Hudson River.

And EPA said then it wanted to finalize the second Five-Year Review report before deciding whether to issue GE a Certificate of Completion.

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US VIRGIN ISLANDS / PUERTO RICO

METRO.PR – translated via Google Translate

[They continue attending powerful fire in recycling plant in Carolina](#)

November 29, 2018



The commissioner of the Bureau of the Fire Department of the Department of Public Safety (DSP), Alberto Cruz Albarrán, reported that both the negotiated he leads, the Bureau for Emergency Management and Disaster Management (NMEAD) and resources of the municipality of Carolina continue attending the fire that broke out since Wednesday afternoon at the JJW Metal recycling plant.



The powerful fire arose after 1:00 pm on Wednesday afternoon

"The fire is confined. However, when the fire is generated in the area where the metals are concentrated, it makes the extinguishing operation complex and prolongs the cooling process," the commissioner said in written statements.

On the other hand, Cruz Albarrán said that work will continue for the next few hours keeping the confinement and the cooling of the fire.

"We have the necessary resources to deal with this situation and as usual in any emergency response event, we activate several units of the Bureau, we have the support of the Emergency Management Bureau and municipal resources of Carolina and others that have been joined the operation," said Cruz Albarrán.

He indicated that the units of Carolina, Canóvanas, Río Grande, Río Piedras, San Juan, the Special Operations Division of Hato Rey, Caguas and the task force of the specialized firefighters unit of Homeland Security of Juncos are outstanding. In addition, there are units of the NMEAD of Ceiba, Caguas, San Juan and Humacao and the municipal fire departments of Carolina, Bayamón Guaynabo and San Juan.

"Fire extinction strategies have caused the smoke column to remain vertical, minimizing the impact on nearby areas. However, I urge the residents of the communities surrounding the incident to take the necessary measures to prevent or prevent any situation that may affect their health," the commissioner concluded.

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National News

Bloomberg Environment: Democrats Actually Like Trump Pick for EPA Office Ahead of Senate Hearing

<https://news.bloombergenvironment.com/environment-and-energy/democrats-actually-like-trump-pick-for-epa-office-ahead-of-senate-hearing>

Tiffany Stecker- Posted Nov. 29, 2018, 7:15 AM

- Alexandra Dapolito Dunn is seen as bipartisan choice to lead EPA toxics office
- Nov. 29 confirmation hearing expected to be smooth, unlike with last Trump pick

Alexandra Dapolito Dunn is the rare Trump administration nominee that Democrats not only support, but embrace.

Her first public appearance as a nominee to head the EPA's chemical safety office comes Nov. 29 at her Senate Environment and Public Works Committee confirmation hearing. The bipartisan praise increases the likelihood that Dunn will be confirmed quickly.

"I'm quite pleased with her nomination," Sen. Tammy Duckworth (D-Ill.), a member of the environment committee, told Bloomberg Environment Nov. 27. "She could make a real difference, and I applaud that."

Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), the committee's ranking Democrat, called Dunn "an impressive nominee" who could help the EPA implement the 2016 amendments to the Toxic Substances Control Act. The agency has repeatedly missed its deadlines under the law for approving new chemicals before coming to market.

"It's not been realized as it can be," Carper told Bloomberg Environment regarding the two year-old law. "She could well be the person to do it, if they'll let her do her job."

Familiar Face

Dunn is a familiar face in Washington after nearly 25 years as an environmental attorney, head of an organization of state environmental regulators, director of a water administrators association, and a law professor.

She spent the last year as the regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Region 1, serving as a liaison between headquarters and New England states, when she was nominated to be assistant administrator for the agency's Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention.

As executive director for the Environmental Council of the States, the state regulator group, Dunn participated in the negotiations that resulted in the 2016 TSCA amendments.

But the Environmental Working Group, which advocates for more restrictions on the use of chemicals and pesticides, remains skeptical that she will tighten regulations in the Trump administration.

Scott Faber, EWG's vice president of government affairs, said he specifically wants to see if Dunn will work to ban methylene chloride, a paint stripper that is linked to over 60 deaths from inhalation in enclosed bathrooms and other workspaces.

Faber also said he wants Dunn to ban chlorpyrifos, a pesticide tied to neurodevelopmental delays in children; maintain the Obama administration's farmworker protection rules; and require health studies before new chemicals can go on the market.

Departure from Dourson

The tone at Dunn's hearing should be a significant departure from the highly-charged hearing for Michael Dourson, the last nominee for that chemicals position.

Dourson withdrew his nomination in December 2017 to avoid "unnecessarily politicizing" the EPA's environmental goals, though it was clear at that point he would not receive enough votes in the Senate for confirmation.

Democratic senators railed against Dourson, a toxicologist whose risk assessment nonprofit organization crafted chemical evaluations that they alleged downplayed the risks of toxic chemicals.

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) cried while telling the story of chemically contaminated groundwater in Hoosick Falls, N.Y., at the October 2017 hearing, and Duckworth called his assessments “pseudoscience for the highest bidders.”

“I didn’t get any questions; it was more in-your-face commentary,” during his confirmation hearing, Dourson told Bloomberg Environment Nov. 28.

He added that Dunn has the ability to bring together groups with disparate interests.

The future assistant administrator “needs to have the kind of background that builds collaboration and listens to all sides,” Dourson said.

Bipartisan Background

The office has been without a Senate-confirmed head since the end of the Obama administration.

It is currently run by Acting Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator Charlotte Bertrand, Deputy Assistant Administrator Louise Wise, and Deputy Assistant Administrator Nancy Beck. Beck has drawn scrutiny stemming from her past lobbying work with the American Chemistry Council, the chemical industry’s trade group.

Dunn also would oversee the EPA’s Office of Pesticide Programs, which has the strongest regulatory authority, the largest staff, and the lion’s share of the chemicals office budget, said Stephen Owens, EPA’s assistant administrator for chemical safety and pollution prevention under President Barack Obama.

Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-W.Va.), whose state has faced problems with perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) in drinking water, said she would ask Dunn about the EPA’s work to assess the risks posed to residents exposed to the chemicals.

“I’m sure she’ll be asked some tough questions, but she’s been in this area for so long,” Capito told Bloomberg Environment. “She has, I think, a very bipartisan background.”

—With assistance from Dean Scott and Pat Rizzuto.

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The Energy 202: Trump's EPA chief said there was 'no political review' of climate report.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/paloma/the-energy-202/2018/11/29/the-energy-202-trump-s-epa-chief-said-there-was-no-political-review-of-climate-report/5bfef3a61b326b60d1280085/?utm_term=.e15c9a549009

By Dino Grandoni- November 29 at 8:58 AM

Andrew Wheeler, acting administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, listens to President Trump speak at the White House in October. (Photo by JIM LO SCALZO/EPA-EFE/REX)

By all accounts, the Trump administration took a hands-off approach in crafting a recent major climate report that outlined the dire economic effects to come from climate change in the United States.

Next time around, that may not be the case.

In an interview at an Energy 202 event at The Washington Post on Wednesday, Andrew Wheeler, acting administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, suggested that Trump administration officials should be more involved in preparing the next version of the congressionally mandated National Climate Assessment.

At the same time, he acknowledged the potential political perils of doing so.

"If we had intervened and made changes to the report, we'd have been accused of manipulating the scientific recommendations of the career staff," Wheeler told The Post's Juliet Eilperin.

Wheeler admitted he didn't read the report before it was published by his agency and 12 others in the federal government. The acting head explained he was still reviewing its contents, which included warnings of climate change posing "a severe threat to Americans' health and pocketbooks," according to my colleagues Brady Dennis and Chris Mooney.

Wheeler confirmed there was "no political review by this administration" of the report, but said the Trump administration will have more discretion over the direction of the next one.

"Going forward, I think we need to take a look at the modeling that's used for the next assessment," Wheeler said.

EPA's Andrew Wheeler admits he did not read the full national climate assessment
EPA Administrator admits he did not read the full national climate assessment (priya mathew/Washington Post Live)

Wheeler's comments were the latest in a series from Trump administration officials calling into question the methodology of the report, which expressed with more certainty than ever the threat climate change poses to lives and livelihoods in the United States. The document described how climate-fueled disasters, like the burning of forests in western states and the bleaching of coral reefs from Hawaii to Florida, are already becoming more commonplace.

The commentary from Trump officials is also a recognition of the political potency of the climate report, which administration officials originally published on the Black Friday following Thanksgiving when many Americans were shopping and not paying attention to the news.

Already, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra (D) suggested he would use the report in his office's numerous lawsuits against the administration's rollback of environmental regulations.

"I think I've read more of it than they have and I haven't read very much," Becerra said in a separate interview at the Energy 202 event. "It's kind of disturbing."

Wheeler and other Trump officials have critiqued the report for what they see as an undue emphasis on the worst-case scenarios for temperature increases, by both the scientists behind the report and the news organizations covering it. The report in fact looked at a wide range of warming scenarios.

The acting EPA chief suggested that focusing on extreme scenarios may have been called for by the previous administration.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the Obama administration told the report's authors: Take a look at the worst case scenario for this report," he said, adding that "this report was drafted at the direction of the Obama administration," even though the assessments are mandated by a 1990 law that calls for a new report every four years.

Work began on the report at the beginning of 2016, though most of the drafting was done after Trump was in office. A former chief science adviser to President Obama, John Holdren, vigorously contested Wheeler's characterization about the Obama administration's influence on the report.

"Mr. Wheeler's insinuation is absolutely false," he said in a statement. Holdren explained his "only instruction" to the U.S. Global Change Research Program, which oversaw the report, was that it "should continue the distinguished tradition of the first three by drawing on the most current peer-reviewed science to illuminate what climate change is doing and is projected to do across the geographic regions and economic and ecological underpinnings of well-being in the United States."

When reached for comment, Michael Kuperberg, executive director of the U.S. Global Change Research Program, pointed to a section of the report itself, which reads: "Where supported by the underlying literature, authors were encouraged to describe the full scope of potential climate change impacts, both negative and positive, including more extreme impacts that are less likely but would have severe consequences."

Political spats over the work of the U.S. Global Change Research Program predate Trump. For example, a White House aide during the George W. Bush presidency, Philip Cooney, asked others to emphasize the uncertainties of climate science in another publication by the group.

James Connaughton, former chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality for Bush, said that Wheeler should stay within the process set up by the program for previous assessments, which were designed to "ensure it is reflecting the most up-to-date science."

"The key is working within the process. It is a good one. It is a deliberate one," Connaughton said.

He added that Wheeler, who began a career working in the federal government in the early 1990s, "has long Washington experience to work within that process."

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Los Angeles Times: California AG and acting EPA chief clash over climate change

https://www.postguam.com/the_globe/nation/california-ag-and-acting-epa-chief-clash-over-climate-change/article_b8c8b042-f37b-11e8-a840-536ea8820894.html

Evan Halper | 1 hr ago

WASHINGTON – The acting chief of the Environmental Protection Agency was on stage Wednesday morning, but he wasn't the one defending his own agency's latest findings about the huge economic toll that unchecked climate change will take on the United States.

It was his nemesis, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who made that case.

The Trump administration continues to disavow the congressionally mandated report by 13 federal agencies that projected dire economic consequences from climate change.

The president has given no scientific basis for rejecting the report, but has instead offered his perception that the environment is on the right track. In an interview this week with The Washington Post, Trump described himself as among the people who "have very high levels of intelligence, but we're not necessarily such believers."

"You look at our air and our water, and it's right now at a record clean," he added.

The climate change report has further intensified the clash between California and the White House over environmental policy, as the state struggles with the kind of devastating wildfires that have already grown substantially bigger and more intense because of global warming, according to the report.

The tension was on full display at an event hosted by The Washington Post on Wednesday morning, when Becerra took the stage as acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler exited it.

"The majority of that report was written in 2016, and it was at the direction of the previous administration," Wheeler said. "It had no political review by this administration. We did not review it. I did not see the report until it was released."

Becerra called the climate report "a scathing indictment of what this administration is trying to do."

"I think I have read more of it than they have, and I haven't read very much. It is kind of disturbing, when they are in charge of trying to protect the nation's environment, for them not to read a report issued by their own folks," he added. "You would hope that driving their policy is the work done by the experts."

The report's assessment paints a dire picture of the worsening effects of global warming as nearly every corner of the country grows more at risk from extreme heat, more devastating storms, droughts and wildfires, waning snowpack and other threats to critical infrastructure, air quality, water supplies and vulnerable communities.

By century's end, thousands of additional deaths will occur each year from worsening heat waves and air pollution, crop yields will decline, and coral reefs and sea-ice ecosystems will dwindle, the report forecasts.

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Brinkwire: Trump officials attack science in dire climate change report

<https://en.brinkwire.com/news/trump-officials-attack-science-in-dire-climate-change-report/>

November 29, 2018 Brinkwire 0 Comments

Trump administration officials are aggressively attacking the science behind a government report released last week that found climate change is set to take a huge chunk out of the U.S. economy by the end of the century.

A rash of officials from President TrumpDonald John TrumpVeterans Affairs Dept says it won't reimburse vets who were underpaid GI Bill benefit payments: report Ex-Clinton spokesman slams Ivanka Trump over defense of private email use: 'Nothing short of outrageous' Sinclair defends segment justifying use of tear gas at border as 'commentary' MORE on down are parroting similar lines to dispute the claims of the congressionally-mandated report, describing the science as "radical," "not based on facts" and based on "worst-case" scenarios.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders at a Tuesday press briefing called the climate report, written by nearly 300 government scientists from 13 federal agencies, "radical."

"It's not based on facts. ... It's not data-driven," Sanders said at the briefing — the only one held by the White House in November.

"We'd like to see something that is more data-driven, that's based on modeling, which is extremely hard to do when you're talking about the climate," she said.

The same day, Interior Secretary Ryan ZinkeRyan Keith ZinkeOvernight Energy: EPA chief joins criticism of climate report | Incoming Oklahoma gov taps Pruitt ally for post | Coal plant closures double in Trump's second year EPA chief criticizes climate report over 'worst-case scenario' The Hill's Morning Report — Pelosi faces first test in pursuit of second Speakership MORE, while visiting California communities devastated by historic wildfires that have been blamed in part on climate change, dismissed the administration's report as being focused on the extremes.

"It appears they took the worst scenarios and they built predictions on that," he told KCRA, an NBC affiliate in Sacramento, Calif.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler said the report "was written in 2016, and was at the direction of the previous administration," suggesting that was why the report had such a dire outlook. He speculated that the Obama administration "told the report's authors to take a look at the worst-case scenario for this report."

"I think a lot of the worst-case scenario information in that assessment is what's concerning a lot of people in this administration," he said.

Trump told reporters "I don't believe it" when he was asked about the report on Monday.

He blamed other countries for failing to step up their emission reductions.

"Right now we're at the cleanest we've ever been and that's very important to me," said Trump, who decided last year to pull the U.S. out of the Paris climate agreement, an international pact meant to drastically limit greenhouse gas emissions. "But if we're clean, but every other place on Earth is dirty, that's not so good."

The report is the second major publication on climate change to be largely dismissed by the Trump administration.

Earlier this fall, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that the world had 12 years to significantly cut carbon emissions or face irreversible environmental damage.

Few Republicans in Congress gave much attention to the report, while Trump questioned who wrote the U.N. paper.

"It was given to me, and I want to look at who drew it," he told reporters at the time. "Because I can give you reports that are fabulous, and I can give you reports that aren't so good. But I will be looking at it, absolutely."

Environmental groups say the critiques from the administration are wholly inaccurate — and come right out of the fossil fuel industry's own playbook.

"It's like the tobacco industry saying they needed more science showing the link to smoking and cancer," said Nathaniel Keohane, senior vice president of climate at the Environmental Defense Fund.

"This is the most data-driven assessment we've ever had in the U.S." he added.

Andrew Rosenberg, director of the Center for Science and Democracy at the Union of Concerned Scientists, took issue with administration claims that the study's data was based on worst-case scenarios.

"It's just factually incorrect that it's based on the most extreme scenarios. It's not," he said.

"It's based on three scenarios. One lower one, one middle ground and one high-emissions scenario taken directly from the IPCC, which means it's been agreed upon by a large number of countries and governments," Rosenberg said.

He criticized the administration for continuing to cast doubt on the idea that humans are contributing to climate change.

"What it seems like they are trying to do is to cast doubt. 'Oh, there is a lot of uncertainty, we're uncertain it's caused by humans.' No, we aren't. There is strong evidence that that's correct," he said.

The worst-case scenario for the planet, Keohane said, is that the reports aren't taken seriously by the administration and Congress.

"The worst-case scenario is that we have an administration that completely ignores the information coming out from its own scientists, its own analysts, and not only rolls back protections and safeguards, but tries to do things like subsidize coal plants to keep them running," he said.

It's possible clashes over climate change could pick up between the Trump administration and Democrats about to take power in the House.

On Tuesday, a bipartisan group of lawmakers released legislation that would charge fossil fuel companies a tax for their carbon dioxide emissions. The legislation would charge \$15 for each ton of carbon emitted into the air and would increase that fee by \$10 every year afterward.

Another bill, introduced by two Democratic senators on Wednesday, aims to transition the U.S. to 100 percent zero-emission vehicles by 2040.

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Indiana Public Media: EPA Calls For Soil Cleanup Around Franklin Sewers

<https://indianapublicmedia.org/news/epa-calls-for-soil-cleanup-around-franklin-sewers.php>

By REBECCA THIELE- Posted November 29, 2018

The Environmental Protection Agency plans to clean up contaminated soil underneath some sewers in Franklin just south of the old Amphenol industrial site. Some residents suspect contamination from the site is causing rare child cancers in the area.

The EPA found high levels of the cancer-causing chemicals TCE and PCE in the sewer bedding, soil, and groundwater surrounding sewers along parts of Forsythe Street and Hamilton Avenue.

"We will be asking the Amphenol company to do something to make sure that contamination is remediated," says Joe Cisneros, chief of the corrective action program for EPA Region 5.

Cisneros says the company has proposed removing contaminated soil from around the sewers as well as replacing some sewer pipes. But the EPA hasn't settled on a remedy yet. The agency expects that work will take one to two years to complete.

The EPA found contamination around sewers on parts of Forsythe Street and Hamilton Avenue. The EPA believes it's found all the contamination in that spot, but says it will do more testing to make sure.

Kari Rhinehart is with the group If It Was Your Child, which thinks pollution from the site could be causing rare child cancers in Franklin. She says this investigation has to go further than just those two streets.

"That doesn't provide relief to those of us whose children have been affected who don't live in that area," she says.

The EPA plans to continue sampling the air in certain homes, but says more residents need to grant the agency access for that to happen. The EPA also wants to evaluate whether the system used to pump the groundwater and treat it for contaminants is working efficiently or if a new remedy might work better.

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Chicago Tribune: Why U.S. EPA allowed Sterigenics, other companies to emit cancer-causing gas into surrounding communities

https://ig-tc.com/business/why-u-s-epa-allowed-sterigenics-other-companies-to-emit/article_e6608d56-3fa4-52f5-9fb4-bd75f0ac7609.html

MICHAEL HAWTHORNE 32 min ago 0

CHICAGO — After a series of explosions at medical sterilization plants during the late 1990s, federal safety officials urged Sterigenics International and other companies to overhaul the way they handled highly volatile and extremely dangerous ethylene oxide gas.

Instead of following through on some of the safety recommendations, the companies persuaded President George W. Bush's administration in 2001 to relax clean air regulations so sterilization facilities could bypass pollution-control equipment and vent the cancer-causing gas directly into the air, according to memos and other documents compiled by the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service at the behest of U.S. Rep. Dan Lipinski, D-Chicago.

California and a handful of other states later adopted their own regulations requiring all sterilization plant emissions to be filtered. But Illinois failed to follow their lead, enabling a Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook and a Medline Industries facility in Waukegan to vent uncontrolled ethylene oxide into neighboring communities for nearly two decades.

The Bush administration's industry-friendly decision garnered little attention at the time. It had been largely forgotten until earlier this year, when a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency analysis found that residential areas near Sterigenics and Medline are among only a few dozen nationwide where the long-term risks of cancer from breathing toxic air pollution exceed federal safety guidelines.

In Willowbrook, Sterigenics rushed to redirect its vents into pollution controls shortly before the EPA released its National Air Toxics Assessment to the public in August. Medline is following suit after the Tribune began asking questions about the facility's emissions.

Yet lawmakers say those voluntary steps fall woefully short of what needs to be done to protect communities from a chemical that increases the long-term risks of breast cancer and lymphomas at extremely low levels.

"It's long past time for the EPA to update its air emissions standards for ethylene oxide — a known carcinogen," said U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, who along with Sen. Tammy Duckworth and Reps. Lipinski, Bill Foster and Brad Schneider cited an ongoing Tribune investigation while introducing new legislation Wednesday intended to address the pollution problems.

Their bills would require the agency to overhaul outdated regulations within 180 days to reflect a significantly more stringent safety limit in the EPA's 2016 reassessment of the chemical's health dangers.

The EPA relied on its new safety limit last year when it calculated cancer risks from the 5,566 pounds of ethylene oxide released in communities surrounding Sterigenics during 2014.

Even with its Willowbrook sterilization chamber vents hooked up to pollution controls again, Sterigenics can legally emit up to 36,400 pounds of ethylene oxide annually at the facility, located in a cluster of nondescript buildings within a mile of four schools and neighborhoods where more than 19,000 people live.

Company-supplied records show the plant released more than 254,000 pounds of ethylene oxide into the air between 1993 and 2017, prompting Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Robert Berlin, the state's attorney of DuPage County, to file a bipartisan lawsuit last month accusing the company of violating state environmental laws.

Sterigenics, Medline and corporate lobbyists have responded with tactics that U.S. chemical industry executives have relied on for decades when confronted with research showing their products are harmful.

Among other things, they have hired an industry-connected researcher to raise doubts about the EPA's assessment of ethylene oxide. The companies also have said the chemical is naturally produced in the body at levels exceeding EPA safety guidelines, citing as proof a review published in an journal that frequently publishes industry-backed articles. And they have tried to pick apart a separate analysis of Willowbrook conducted by an arm of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, claiming falsely that the agency "cherry-picked" samples to get the results federal researchers allegedly wanted.

When the EPA announced the day before Thanksgiving that it might have overestimated levels of ethylene oxide in air samples collected in May near Sterigenics, the company, business lobbyists and right-wing propagandists claimed falsely that the federal agency and local media had needlessly scared residents.

"Unfortunately, the flawed report has ... stigmatized the community and caused good people to wrongly worry about a facility that operates safely and provides a vital service to our health care system," Sterigenics said in a statement.

But the announcement that the analysis of air samples collected in May might be flawed has no effect on the EPA's estimates of cancer risks in the Willowbrook area, which were based on pollution legally emitted by Sterigenics in 2014.

Additional air samples are being collected by agency officials and by consultants hired by local governments, all of whom will analyze the results using a method that can clearly discern the differences between ethylene oxide and related chemicals.

Given the potency of ethylene oxide, questions remain about whether continued use of the chemical close to homes, schools and shopping centers is safe.

"EPA has been making questionable decisions about how to regulate ethylene oxide for many, many years, and the regulations have been out of sync with the latest science for years now," Lipinski said. "It's time for the agency to do its job and protect the health of the people of Illinois and the rest of the country."

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ThinkProgress: Trump, EPA angry their climate report accurately models their terrible policies

The Trump presidency is literally the worst case scenario for climate change.

<https://thinkprogress.org/trump-epa-annoyed-their-climate-report-accurately-models-their-terrible-policies-406f86225b33/>

JOE ROMM- NOV 29, 2018, 12:38 PM

President Donald Trump and his Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief are both angry that the government's newly released climate report includes an accurate analysis of their own disastrously bad climate policies.

Andrew Wheeler, acting administrator of the EPA, which vetted and signed off on the report, went so far as to issue a press release Wednesday evening falsely claiming that the Obama administration had pushed a "worst-case scenario" in the congressionally mandated National Climate Assessment (NCA).

Inaccurate EPA News release on the new climate report it had vetted.

INACCURATE EPA NEWS RELEASE ON THE NEW CLIMATE REPORT IT HAD VETTED.

The criticism is absurd for three reasons. First, the Trump team controlled and vetted virtually every aspect of this report — Volume 2 of the NCA — that they are now complaining about.

"The vast majority of Volume 2 was drafted, reviewed, and finalized under this administration, not under Obama," as Dr. Katharine Hayhoe, one of the report's authors, pointed out in an email to ThinkProgress.

Second, "Contrary to their assertions, the report does not focus primarily on a 'worst-case' or 'most extreme' scenario," explained Hayhoe, who is co-director of Texas Tech's Climate Science Center.

The NCA includes a variety of scenarios modeling different levels of climate action on curbing carbon pollution — strong, modest, and no action — the same as every other major national and global climate report has used for decades.

A man watches flames consume a residence as a wildfire rages in Ventura, California on December 5, 2017. CREDIT: AP Photo/Noah Berger

Trump's EPA chief blames climate assessment's dire warnings on Obama administration

Third — and most ironic of all — the scenario that the administration labels "worst-case" is nothing more than a modeling of Trump's do-nothing climate policies.

It is the Trump administration that is the only major government in the world to announce its withdrawal from the Paris climate accord, currently the world's only hope for avoiding the catastrophe of business-as-usual emissions.

And it is the Trump administration that is pursuing policies to increase the burning of coal, oil, and natural gas while gutting efforts to advance clean energy.

In fact, the administration is so indifferent to a livable climate — so indifferent to the health and well-being of our children and grandchildren — that they simply take for granted that we are headed to a disastrously high level of warming, 7°F (4°C) above pre-industrial global temperatures.

For instance, in a 500-page environmental impact statement released in August to justify rolling back Obama-era fuel-economy standards for cars and light trucks, the Trump team simply assumed that Earth will warm 7°F by century's end.

In what is effectively an entirely new level of climate denial, the government in its impact assessment assumed that this extreme level of warming can't be stopped, and so freezing car standards at 2020 levels simply won't matter much.

Any resemblance to the policies of Donald Trump are purely intentional. CREDIT: John Cook.

Trump 'poses the single greatest threat' to our climate, bombshell UN report makes clear

The NCA makes clear that such an outcome is not inevitable, although avoiding such levels requires going far beyond the actions agreed to under the Paris accord, which Trump has already rejected.

Advertisement

But this reality didn't stop Trump from saying Monday he didn't "believe" the findings of his own administration's report.

It didn't stop White House Spokeswoman Lindsay Walters from falsely asserting in an emailed statement to reporters that the NCA "is largely based on the most extreme scenario, which contradicts long-established trends...."

White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders repeated this claim at a press briefing Tuesday, asserting the NCA "is based on the most extreme model scenario, which contradicts long-established trends." (Sanders' false claims were fact-checked live by CNN at the time.)

Again, the scenario the White House is complaining about is simply business as usual emissions — and it's precisely the scenario the administration itself thinks is inevitable.

This is what America will look like if we follow Trump's climate policies

What's more, the scenario is not scientifically controversial. Quite the reverse, as explained in a December 2017 study in the journal Nature, "Greater future global warming inferred from Earth's recent energy budget."

The study's co-author, climatologist Ken Caldeira, told the UK Independent at the time, "Our study indicates that if emissions follow a commonly used business-as-usual scenario, there is a 93 per cent chance that global warming will exceed 4°C by the end of this century."

The recent remarks on the NCA by President Trump, the White House, and the former coal lobbyist who is now leading the EPA, make clear this administration literally has no idea what they are doing on climate change — and they don't care.

That is a worst-case scenario for the nation and the world.\

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Washington Examiner: Daily on Energy, presented by GAIN: Climate change, Saudi tensions to greet Trump at G20

<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/daily-on-energy-presented-by-gain-climate-change-saudi-tensions-to-greet-trump-at-g20>

by John Siciliano & Josh Siegel | November 29, 2018 12:13 PM

CLIMATE CHANGE, SAUDI TENSIONS TO GREET TRUMP AT G20: The Group of 20 nations meeting in Argentina appear to want to appease President Trump when it comes to the issue of climate change to be discussed this week among the countries' leaders, according to a leaked draft communique.

The draft statement omits any reference to the 2015 Paris climate accord, and it steers clear of any mention of the recent United Nations report on the need for a rapid switch to renewable energy in the next 10-20 years to limit the devastating consequences of climate change.

Trump's previous refusals: Trump had tried to gut any mention of climate change from last year's G20 communique in Hamburg, Germany. Later, he refused to sign onto the G7 communique in 2018 at a meeting in Canada because it mentioned the Paris accord.

The Trump administration most recently pushed back against a congressionally-mandated national climate report released last Friday.

Pressure piling up on Trump: Trump is also facing pressure in Buenos Aires to resolve the trade war with China, while also seeking to hold Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of oil-rich Saudi Arabia accountable for the death of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Trump has refrained from criticizing the crown prince despite evidence that shows the order to murder Khashoggi likely came from Salman.

Trump wants to secure a major arms deal with the Saudis, but Congress stands poised to take action to put the deal on pause in the 116th Congress.

The White House did not include the crown prince in the list of meetings Trump is expected to have while in Argentina.

Welcome to Daily on Energy, compiled by Washington Examiner Energy and Environment Writers John Siciliano (@JohnDSiciliano) and Josh Siegel (@SiegelScribe). Email dailyonenergy@washingtonexaminer.com for tips, suggestions, calendar items and anything else. If a friend sent this to you and you'd like to sign up, click here. If signing up doesn't work, shoot us an email and we'll add you to our list.

PENCE APPEARS TO PATCH THINGS UP WITH FINLAND AFTER TRUMP'S WILDFIRE FAUX PAS: After Trump mischaracterized talks with Finland about forest management and wildfires earlier this month, Vice President Mike Pence appears to be the point man to patch things up with the Nordic country.

Pence met with Prime Minister Juha Sipila of Finland on Wednesday afternoon to reaffirm the "strong" ties between the two countries, according to an evening statement from the White House. Trump did not attend.

Clean the forest floors: Trump had created a bit of awkwardness while visiting the devastated town of Paradise in California by suggesting that Finnish President Sauli Niinisto Finland told him that Finland rakes its forests to prevent wildfires. Niinisto said that he did not recall discussing California's wildfire problems as Trump had claimed.

Trump left it up to Pence to hold the bilateral meeting Wednesday.

"The Vice President reaffirmed the importance of our strong bilateral relationship, and both agreed on the importance of transatlantic and regional cooperation in facing global challenges," the White House said.

Did climate change come up? Climate change may have come up in the talks, as they did discuss regional security matters and the Arctic. Finland currently chairs the international Arctic Council that the U.S. is a member of and used to chair up until last year. Finland has made dealing with climate change a top focus under its chairmanship.

Finnish media outlets reported that Sipila met with Republican and Democratic lawmakers to discuss climate change while in Washington.

PERRY TOUTS US AS EXAMPLE TO THE WORLD FOR CO2 REDUCTIONS: Energy Secretary Rick Perry said Thursday morning that the U.S. is the model to the world for how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions despite Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord.

Perry explained that although "America got criticized for backing away" from the climate deal, it should not be taken as the U.S. not having an interest in dealing with the problem of global warming.

"We have great interest in it, but we just don't talk about it," Perry said in giving the keynote speech at a Consumer Energy Alliance forum on the power grid.

Bragging rights: Perry added that the U.S. has cut overall emissions 14 percent over the last 13 years, while his home state of Texas was able to cut emissions while increasing oil and natural gas production and adding more cars on the road.

The U.S. story “isn’t just rhetoric,” because “it’s not bragging if you can do it,” he added, while not mentioning the recent national climate assessment released last week that talked about economic losses in the nation if climate change is not addressed.

Buy natural gas: His big pitch to the world is to buy more U.S. natural gas to help other nations reduce their carbon footprints, he said.

“My job is to sell a lot of [liquefied natural gas] around the world” to help others reduce emissions, he said. “I think there is a great story to be told here.”

Tackling climate change Texas style: Texas reduced its emissions by nearly 20 percent while growing its economy, which was primarily the result of fuel switching to natural gas and building more state-of-the-art power plants to burn the fuel, he explained.

“I shared that with people around the world,” Perry said. “Here’s a model that works.”

PERRY TO ANNOUNCE RED TEAM/BLUE TEAM WAR GAMES ON DEFENDING THE GRID: Perry also discussed an upcoming announcement on Thursday that the Energy Department and an outside institution will be launching cyber war games focused on defending the grid and infrastructure from hackers.

The Cyber Defense Competition will work with national labs on setting up a red team versus blue team scenario where “one group will be attacking infrastructure and the other will be defending against it,” Perry said Thursday at a forum hosted by the Consumer Energy Alliance.

The red team/blue team competition “breeds excellence” at a time when real threats face the U.S. on the cybersecurity front.

He said he just got done shooting a video with the outside participants in the exercise, and that the competition will be announced soon.

Cyber defense is bipartisan: Perry said the issuing of defending infrastructure from attack extends across both aisles. “Efforts in this area is truly bipartisan,” he said. It is “tantamount to the future of this country” that all sides come together, he continued.

“These are changing time in a very challenging moment,” Perry said.

TRUMP’S OPPONENTS HOPE HIS CLIMATE REPORT WILL UNDERMINE HIM IN COURT: Opponents of Trump’s deregulatory agenda are salivating over the possibility of using the administration’s own National Climate Assessment, which concluded that global warming will significantly hurt the economy, as a tool to defeat him in the courts.

The findings conflict with Trump’s policies, which discount the cost of climate change in favor of the view that a lighter touch on industry will inspire investment and economic growth.

“We’ll use every piece of that report that we can [in court],” California Attorney General Xavier Becerra, who has sued Trump’s government more than a dozen times, said Wednesday in an interview with the Washington Post.

Making the case: Climate hawks will try to use the government assessment to bolster their claims that the administration has reached decisions arbitrarily, underestimating the costs caused by carbon pollution and global warming and discounting the benefits of limiting it.

The pitfall: But legal experts interviewed by Josh say that judges will mostly make decisions based on how they interpret an unresolved legal dispute about the federal government's authority to regulate carbon dioxide -- and not on the administration's statements on climate change.

"Opponents may have to do some very creative lawyering to persuade the court about the relevance of the National Climate Assessment," said Joseph Goffman, an environmental law professor at Harvard University and former EPA attorney in the Obama administration. "The court is ultimately going to focus on questions of statutory interpretation."

Read Josh's full report [here](#).

DEMOCRATS EXPRESS CONFIDENCE IN TRUMP'S CHEMICALS OFFICE NOMINEE: Senate Democrats on Thursday expressed confidence in Trump's nominee to lead EPA's chemicals office, after opposition forced the president was to withdraw his original choice.

"I am pleased to say to you are clearly no Michael Dourson," Sen. Tom Carper of Delaware, the top Democrat of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, told the nominee, Alexandra Dunn, during her confirmation hearing.

Carper was referring derogatorily to Dourson, Trump's first nominee for the chemicals office, who even Republicans opposed because of his ties to the chemical industry, forcing him to withdraw.

Carper said in contrast to Dourson, Dunn provides "objectivity and credibility." She was introduced to the committee by another Democrat, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, who wryly said, "your eyes and ears do not deceive you...a Democratic senator is introducing a Trump environmental nominee."

Promises change in direction: Dunn, tabbed to lead EPA's Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention Office, seemed to sufficiently assure senators that she would properly implement a bipartisan law approved during the last year of the Obama administration, known as the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), that set rules for how the agency determines health and safety risks of chemicals.

Democrats say the Trump administration is not faithfully implementing the law, favoring industry and not following science when deciding on whether to ban chemicals.

Independent from political pressure: Carper said his vote on whether to support Dunn would depend on whether she could assure a "change in direction" at the chemicals office, not just a "change in personnel."

He sought assurances that political leaders at EPA would give Dunn the freedom to to implement the chemicals law faithfully.

Dunn promised to hold "open door hours" with career staff EPA staff to "let them know their opinions are valued."

Known as a centrist, Dunn has most recently been administrator of EPA Region 1, the local office covering the New England area. Prior to that, Dunn served as executive director and general counsel for the Environmental Council of States, a nonpartisan nonprofit that helps states improve their environments.

BRAZIL PULLS OUT OF HOSTING UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE: Brazil on Wednesday pulled out of hosting next year's United Nations global summit meeting on climate change, a major statement as Latin America's largest country backs away from leadership on the issue after the election of a far-right president.

The decision comes a week before the inauguration of Jair Bolsonaro, who has called for a pro-business approach that favors deforestation in the Amazon, and weakens enforcement of environmental laws.

In a statement, Brazil's foreign ministry said it decided not to host the conference, scheduled to occur next November, in order to save money.

PATAGONIA GIVES \$10 MILLION FROM GOP TAX CUT TO CLIMATE GROUPS: Sustainable outdoor clothing company Patagonia Inc. is donating \$10 million to conservation and climate groups from money it saved due to Trump administration's tax cut package — but the firm's CEO isn't particularly happy about it.

"Based on last year's irresponsible tax cut, Patagonia will owe less in taxes this year — \$10 million less, in fact," Rose Marcario said in a LinkedIn post Wednesday. "Instead of putting the money back into our business, we're responding by putting \$10 million back into the planet. Our home planet needs it more than we do."

"Taxes protect the most vulnerable in our society, our public lands and other life-giving resources," she added. "In spite of this, the Trump administration initiated a corporate tax cut, threatening these services at the expense of our planet."

Patagonia's \$10 million donation will supplement the standard 1 percent of sales the company has given to environmental and preservation groups since 1985.

RUNDOWN

Reuters Pressure mounts to bury carbon emissions, but who will pay?

Politico Bernie Sanders not stepping into Senate Energy void as liberals fear Manchin

Wall Street Journal Falling crude prices test Big Oil's new financial discipline

New York Times Study warns of cascading health risks from the changing climate

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ABC7 Chicago: Sterigenics lawsuit goes to court Thursday; EPA to hold forum in Willowbrook

<https://abc7chicago.com/health/sterigenics-lawsuit-goes-to-court-thursday/4787453/>

By Jessica D'Onofrio- Updated 19 mins ago

CHICAGO (WLS) -- The battle over potentially dangerous chemicals at a suburban plant was in court Thursday.

The EPA has a meeting about Sterigenics International Thursday as well.

Hundreds of people have come forward seeking legal representation for health issues after living near the Sterigenics plant in Willowbrook. In one of the lawsuits, a woman says she developed breast cancer with no family history of it and lives one fourth of a mile away from the facility which has been in operation since 1984.

The facility uses ethylene oxide to sterilize medical equipment and food products. Controversy surrounding Sterigenics was sparked after EPA research linked unusually high cancer risks in the Willowbrook area to the company's emissions of the gas.

Thursday morning, Sterigenics wanted 9 lawsuits reassigned to one judge, but several law firms want individual jury trials for their individual clients. The judge decided he will have to make the decision with another judge in the near future.

"Ethylene oxide causes cancer," said Antonio Romanucci, plaintiff's attorney. "They know this. They knew this, but they hid it. They hid it from the Willowbrook community and they hid their discharge emissions from the government too."

"Sterigenics has never accepted responsibility for what they've done, but what have they started to do recently? They're taking ads out in newspapers. They're doing their marketing. They're doing their advertising. So even today, they have not accepted responsibility for what's happened to this community," said Jeffrey Kroll,

The EPA released a statement last week saying they may have overstated the emissions coming from the plant due to flawed testing.

Thursday night, the EPA will be providing more information to the community based on its research so far. It will hold a community forum at 7 p.m. at Ashton Place Banquets in Willowbrook.

Meanwhile, Sterigenics maintains that its facility is operating safely.

Last week, Sterigenics released a statement saying, "This new EPA disclosure also invalidates the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry ("ATSDR") report, which was already questioned by experts. The EPA's flawed samples were the same samples from which the ATSDR selectively chose data as the basis for its August report.

"Now we know the controversy regarding our Willowbrook facility was created by a study that was based on flawed air samples. Unfortunately, the flawed report has needlessly created fear in the hearts of Willowbrook residents, stigmatized the community and caused good people to wrongly worry about a facility that operates safely and performs a critical service to our health care system.

"It's time to slow the rush to judgment. Citizens deserve the facts. Sterigenics remains committed to working with officials in support of evolving regulations and providing the facts to the community to reassure everyone that our facility operates safely."

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Wastedive: EPA Recycling Summit highlights lack of national responsibility

The America Recycles Day event was considered historic for the breadth of stakeholders it assembled, but with so many different ideas of success, will it be possible to make meaningful change?

<https://www.wastedive.com/news/epa-recycling-summit-lack-of-national-responsibility/542482/>

Cole Rosengren- Nov. 29, 2018

If all goes well, this year's America Recycles Day may be remembered as the one where the national conversation began to coalesce around a collective vision.

Or it will go down as the height of choreographed symbolism.

Earlier this month, many of the recycling world's biggest names came together in Washington, D.C. to affirm the industry's economic and environmental importance at the first-ever EPA Recycling Summit. Forty-four people signed a voluntary pledge in a photo-op with Acting EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler. Then, an even larger group gathered in a cavernous oak-paneled meeting room for two hours of discussion. A large map of the U.S., a relic of the building's former Interstate Commerce Commission days, loomed fittingly overhead.

WASTE DIVE

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The event carried the weight of historic import — yet for all the fanfare, it drew limited media coverage. Beyond a short piece the day after, Waste Dive has also struggled to evaluate the proceedings. As tempting as it's been to write this non-binding pledge off as more theater than substance, the obvious significance assigned to gathering stakeholders together warrants more attention than the event has so far received.

The range of financial, political, social and regulatory connections among those in attendance is vast. In a country that lacks a national recycling policy, the various stakeholders' individual sense of responsibility in addressing current issues will prove key to whether this EPA pledge yields any tangible results.

The EPA

The EPA's role in helping to address the many structural changes in recycling that have taken place over the past year or more has at times been unclear. Many career staff have continued to attend conferences and remain engaged in ongoing dialogue, but direct actions have been limited. This event was seen as an opportunity for the agency to showcase its intent to play a larger role, albeit more than a year after China's scrap import restrictions upended the conversation last summer.

Wheeler sat in the center of it all, flanked by Acting Assistant Administrator of the Office of Land and Emergency Management Barry Breen and nominee for the post Peter Wright, to set the agenda. In keeping with President Trump's proclamation and recent framing in the EPA's latest Facts & Figures report, he emphasized the economic angle first and foremost. Wheeler also touched on common points — commodity market shifts, public education challenges, aging infrastructure, inconsistent measurement standards — before making clear how far EPA's jurisdiction actually extended.

"The issues we face are of national significance and will require collective action to successfully address them," he said, reading from prepared remarks. "Our role at EPA is to help develop best practices, provide the data the public needs to monitor their recycling efforts and incentivize action through our programs and grants."

After about 20 minutes, Wheeler departed without taking questions or engaging in the dialogue.

The brands

Big name manufacturers have an interest in seeing their products recycled in order to maintain an image of environmental stewardship — and, in some cases, guarantee a steady stream of feedstock. However, they view themselves as only one part of the equation. Rather than an extended producer responsibility system for packaging, as exists in some other countries, they prefer a form of shared responsibility. A sizable chunk of that gets placed on the consumer.

The challenge there, as made clear at a morning session organized by Keep America Beautiful and Keurig Dr Pepper, is that even the most amenable consumers remain confused. Following a lecture on behavioral science, seven focus group participants shared their grievances and questions for about an hour as industry professionals listened.

While far from scientific, the range of comments showed how much work needs to be done if consumer education is considered the key to success. The most avid recyclers still admitted to being unsure of how the process worked, while others expressed outright distrust in the system.

"This is the first I've heard of the single stream recycling," said one.

"I love the environment as much as anybody, but I would still like to know what the purpose of all this is," said a self-proclaimed non-recycler. "It's like we're sheep."

"You guys are making money and we're sitting here going through all this effort," observed another occasional recycler.

During the EPA summit, Keep America Beautiful CEO Helen Lowman described this portion of the event as being the most compelling, reemphasizing the importance of consumer responsibility.

Others at the table representing companies that make the products in question struck a similar tone by taking various shares of responsibility upon themselves while still maintaining a healthy distance.

"Our consumers tell us one thing — and that is they look for us to give them sustainable products and packages," said Stephen Sikra, associate director of corporate R&D at Procter & Gamble. "While they're buying our products because they want them to perform, they look to us to design it properly for proper recovery and proper recycling."

"Making it easy for customers is a very important step, and quite frankly it's not easy enough right now. We have to make it easier as an industry and we have to design the right way and we have to tell the customer how to recycle in the right way," declared Zach Freeze, senior director of strategic initiatives for sustainability at Walmart.

"We know that packaging waste is a problem. It's a global problem and we know our packages are contributing to that problem," said Ryan Guthrie, group director of federal government relations for Coca-Cola — which, like the others, has set its own future goals around packaging recyclability. Guthrie added that while his company is willing to invest significant marketing dollars to get the message out, responsibility would need to be shared by all in the room. "It's good for our planet, it's good for our communities, and frankly it's good for business — and so we're committed to it at Coca Cola."

The collectors and their customers

Recyclers — both public and private — struck a different tone. They have been steadfast in their insistence that recycling service needs a cost increase due to the modern logistics of collection and sorting. In municipalities that have "zero waste" or high diversion rate goals, those costs may become even higher.

"SWANA believes that the current market disruption caused by China's waste import restriction imposes unique burdens on local governments, who are often stuck between vocal citizens that demand ever-increasing recycling goals and the practical reality of volatile commodity markets," said CEO David Biderman, adding that the organization "wants to move beyond pointing fingers at aspirational or confused citizens."

Later in the dialogue, Biderman also added, "Maybe we should stop thinking about chasing tons and we should be going after the right tons."

"China did not cause our market disruption, but it did expose a number of weaknesses in U.S. residential recycling, including a collection system that varies by community and is driven by local wishes instead of manufacturing demand," said ISRI President Robin Wiener.

The NWRA, representing private interests, took an even more direct line.

"I've heard a lot of the larger companies and entities in the room talk about making materials that are recyclable. Just because something is recyclable doesn't mean it has a market to be recycled," said CEO Darrell Smith. "It's very commendable to make these products that can be recycled, but maybe try to work with the people that wind up with the stuff to try to find a market for it."

NWRA members Waste Management and Republic Services, the only two industry companies at the table, expressed similar sentiments — which echoed the messaging they've been delivering during earnings calls and conferences for the past year.

Brent Bell, Waste Management's vice president of recycling, listed off the standard statistics: an approximate average 25% contamination rate and the fact that 60% of what his company is currently collecting has no value. Republic's vice president of recycling, Pete Keller, emphasized the need to change municipal contract structures.

"Changing commodity markets, changing material streams, additional program recyclables — that's the part of our business that's broken," he said. "We've come to the realization very painfully that we can't continue to live that way."

The question of what this financial pressure means for local governments was also front and center.

"We have recovered from crashes before and we can expect to recover again," said Southeast Recycling Development Council Executive Director Will Sagar, describing local governments as being at the "headwater of volatility." He added, "We need an intervention to provide stability for municipal collection programs and we have to approach the contamination problem."

The National Association of Counties, among others, expressed similar feelings. The Recycling Partnership, a corporate-backed nonprofit that assists state and local governments, expressed characteristic optimism while also emphasizing a sense of urgency.

"We can make measurable change between now and next year in those four areas. In fact, we have to. Communities cannot bear the cost burden of recycling alone. They look to the companies, to governments and to organizations like many of those in the room to help them — and help them we must," declared CEO Keefe Harrison. "And we must do it quickly, because if we do not, they will not survive this economic blip."

The back end

Also represented were a host of material-specific trade associations, investment groups and others that have a direct stake in what happens post-collection. They also had their own focal points, pushing for more clarity around infrastructure priorities and a new sense of how the conversation has been framed to date.

"There's trillions of dollars in investment capital that could come into this sector that's going into more linear models today and a lot of the capital is on the sidelines for a variety of reasons," said Bridget Croke, vice president of external affairs for Closed Loop Partners. "Investors don't have a clear sense of the availability of good feedstock that is coming to bear."

"From an infrastructure perspective, we need to think about what is the future of packaging," said Sustainable Packaging Coalition Director Nina Goodrich. "We're really focused on what we have today, and what we can recycle, but if we want to get ahead, and we want to lead, we need to work with those companies that are creating the future of packaging and understand how to create that infrastructure for tomorrow's package."

"This is an exciting time to have this discussion, and I encourage flexibility and creativity as we think about the models that will take us into the future, [which] may not be the models that have brought us to where we are today," said Steve

Russell, vice president of the American Chemistry Council's plastics division. "Nobody wants material to be wasted, nobody wants the environment contaminated by plastic or paper or aluminum or glass. We want to all do better."

The list went on, with further perspectives from paper, plastic, aluminum and other interests, before one penultimate comment brought a hint of skepticism to the proceedings.

"I think the one thing we are missing that is absolutely critical to our success is a shared vision of what the future looks like and why we want to get there. Not just how we get there," said Jeff Wooster, global sustainability director for Dow Packaging & Specialty Plastics. "We've got to come up with a shared vision around recycling that really inspires each and every one of our companies — and each and every one of our organizations, and governments around the country, and individual citizens — to really take part in this process if we really want it to be successful. We can't just keep doing the same education programs and the same things that we've been doing for the last 15 years and expect a different result."

What happens next?

Those last remarks raise an evergreen question about recycling in the U.S. today. When it means so many different things to so many different people — who all have different stakes in making it work, and different definitions of what making it works means — how can true progress be measured? When curbside recycling — largely the focus of the event — is often viewed in terms of profit rather than public utility, who sets the conditions and who reaps the benefits? When policy authority is largely deferred to state and local governments — which have a wide range of capabilities and authority themselves — where does the EPA fit in? When programs or products fall through the cracks, who is the last line of defense to catch them in an open market system?

Some of these questions may be addressed in further meetings and calls planned around the four key action areas for the months ahead. The hope is to reassemble with happier results to report for America Recycles Day 2019. In the meantime, EPA's Barry Breen did his best to sum it all up as the event concluded.

"We hope that together among ourselves and with others who are interested in joining over the next several months, we can develop a national action plan. Will it be perfect? No. But do we have a chance to wait and do nothing? Absolutely not," said Breen. "Doing nothing is not an option, because everybody signed that sheet that says you've going to do something."

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Chemicalwatch: Solvents industry submits TCE data to US EPA

HSIA says weight of evidence does not support link to cardiac malformations

<https://chemicalwatch.com/72451/solvents-industry-submits-tce-data-to-us-epa>

Kelly Franklin- 29 November 2018 / Solvents, TSCA, United States

The Halogenated Solvents Industry Alliance (HSIA) has submitted the draft results of an industry-sponsored study on trichloroethylene (TCE) to the US EPA to inform the agency's ongoing risk evaluation of the solvent.

And with the latest findings, presented in the draft report "An oral (drinking water) study of the effects of trichloroethylene (TCE) on foetal heart development in sprague dawley rats," the HSIA says that the weight of scientific evidence does not support in utero TCE exposure as a cause of cardiac malformations.

Submission of the data follows industry criticism of a study relied on during the TSCA work plan risk assessment of TCE, which linked the solvent to foetal heart malformations. The American Chemistry Council joined the HSIA in 2017 raising

concern with the Johnson et al study, in the context of a proposed TSCA section 6 rule to ban the solvent in certain applications.

At the time, the HSIA had urged the EPA to withdraw the rulemaking, on the grounds that it is based on a "very deficient risk assessment". And it submitted multiple requests to delay the process to replicate its own version of the study.

The EPA quietly signalled it would do so, by moving the TCE rulemakings to its 'long-term action' list and by modifying the scope of its ongoing risk evaluation to re-address those uses. NGOs, meanwhile, blasted the "last-ditch effort" to discredit evidence of the substance's toxicity.

Data 'invaluable'

In a cover letter for the recent study, submitted to the public docket for the TCE risk evaluation, the HSIA said it believes the new data "will be invaluable for addressing criticisms raised in the published literature, by other regulatory agencies, and in comments concerning the use of the Johnson et al cardiac malformation data as a basis for establishing a non-cancer toxicity value".

"With these results, there are now EPA guideline studies by all three exposure routes that have found no relationship between in-utero TCE exposure and cardiac malformations," the HSIA added.

A draft risk evaluation for TCE is expected in the coming weeks, ahead of its December 2019 deadline to be finalised.

With no active comment period for the evaluation underway, it is unlikely the new data will have a bearing on the upcoming draft. However, the EPA made clear in the release of its first draft evaluation under the new TSCA that it will be considering additional comments, and allow for the resubmission of information the submitter feels has not been addressed, before the assessments are finalised.

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Ecowatch: EPA Head Wheeler Hints Administration Could Meddle With Next Climate Assessment

<https://www.ecowatch.com/wheeler-epa-national-climate-assessment-2621845238.html>

Olivia Rosane- Nov. 29, 2018 07:53AM EST

The Trump administration might have tried to bury the most recent U.S. government climate change report by releasing it the Friday of a holiday weekend, but it did not interfere with the writing of the report itself, officials at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration confirmed to the Huffington Post. But if former coal lobbyist and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler gets his way, that could change when it comes time to write the next national climate assessment.

Volume II of the Fourth National Climate Assessment, released Friday, stated clearly that the global climate is changing faster than at any time in human history, primarily because of human actions. It further warned that continued inaction could cost the U.S. thousands of lives and billions of dollars. That's a conclusion that various administration officials, including the president himself, have disputed. Wheeler added his voice to the chorus during remarks made at a Washington Post event Wednesday.

"Going forward, I think we need to take a look at the modeling that's used for the next assessment," Wheeler said, as POLITICO reported.

Writing for The Huffington Post, Sara Boboltz and Alexander C. Kaufman explained why political meddling of the type Wheeler described could have serious consequences:

The announcement is concerning in light of a previous incident of political interference. In 2005, Philip Clooney, a former oil lobbyist working for the George W. Bush administration, was caught altering language in climate science reports to weaken the link between fossil fuels and rising global temperatures.

What Wheeler appeared to suggest Wednesday goes beyond that. He said the administration could take a dangerously optimistic route by developing what the EPA chief called "more realistic projections" incorporating future advancements in "technology and innovation."

Wheeler also accused the administration of former President Barack Obama of directing report authors to focus on worst-case-scenario outcomes.

"The drafting of this report was drafted at the direction of the Obama administration," Wheeler claimed at the event. "And I don't know this for a fact—I wouldn't be surprised if the Obama administration told the report's authors to take a look at the worst case scenario for this report."

Wheeler's comments echoed a misrepresentation by press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders that the report was based on "the most extreme modeled scenario, which contradicts long established trends," as CNN reported.

Report author and climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe took to Twitter to correct the administration's characterization of the report's use of the "worst case scenario." The report actually took pains to lay out several different emissions scenarios, she explained. But the actual rise of greenhouse gas emissions in the past 15 to 20 years is in fact closer to higher emissions scenarios.

End Climate Silence founder and Director Dr. Genevieve Guenther further laid out the problem with dismissing the report as focusing on the most extreme projections. Climate scientists typically use several different emissions trajectories that lead to different concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide and different temperature increases. The "worst" of these, referred to as RCP8.5, is actually based on "our current trend," Guenther pointed out.

Obama's Science Adviser John Holdren also disputed the claim that he had directed the scientists and agencies behind the report to reach any particular conclusion.

"My only instruction was that the U.S. Global Change Research Program should continue the distinguished tradition of the first three by drawing on the most current peer-reviewed science to illuminate what climate change is doing and is projected to do across the geographic regions and economic and ecological underpinnings of well-being in the United States," he told POLITICO in an email.

The national climate assessment is mandated by Congress to be released every four years. Despite Wheeler's claims, most of the recent assessment was drafted and revised while Trump, not Obama, was in office, as Hayhoe confirmed.

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Riverbender: Contaminated Wood River: A look at the report on Illinois coal ash ponds

<https://www.riverbender.com/articles/details/contaminated-wood-river-a-look-at-the-report-on-illinois-coal-ash-ponds-32275.cfm>

by Cory Davenport- published November 29 2018 11:39 AM

EAST ALTON – A group of non-profit environmental watchdogs have released a report regarding coal ash pollution in the State of Illinois – and the Riverbend made its list.

The report comes in the wake of utility companies being forced to publicly report groundwater monitoring data on their websites, as required by 2015 federal regulations regarding coal ash. It was created by the Environmental Integrity Project (EIP), Earthjustice, Prairie Rivers Network and the Sierra Club. Its ultimate determination was that 90 percent – or 22 of 24 – coal-fired power plants in Illinois have groundwater with unsafe levels of at least one toxic pollutant.

In the Riverbend, the former Wood River Power Plant, which was formerly operated by Dynegy – a company with many mentions in the report – has groundwater near its coal ash with six times the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) safe level of arsenic, double the safe amount of sulfate, nine times the safe level of molybdenum and as much as 23 times the the safe levels for boron.

But what do these chemicals mean to the nearby wetlands, major river and communities?

According to the report, arsenic, which is a known human toxin causing death in too high concentrations, can cause multiple types of cancer, neurological damage and “other health effects.” Boron is a threat to those still developing. It poses developmental risks to humans, including low birth weights, and can result in stunted growth. It can also result in plant toxicity in aquatic ecosystems, the report stated, which is especially dangerous considering the multiple nearby wetlands. Sulfate is a known causer of diarrhea, and molybdenum damages the body's kidneys and liver in too high of concentrations.

At the former site of the Wood River Power Plant, the report states there are at least four coal ash ponds collectively storing more than one and a half million cubic yards of coal ash. Those ponds are located in Alton near both the Mississippi River and Wood River, which is a nearby tributary of the Mississippi. None of the coal ash ponds are lined. The report stated the primary ash bond contains coal ash, is within coal ash and on top of ash. It was built on ash and its berms are made of ash as well.

The report does not state to what extent nearby groundwater is utilized for drinking, but the potential for contamination of the wetlands near the old plant and the proximity of these contaminants to the Mississippi River are both items of concern. Many people who source their water from wells near their homes do not test their water, however, and most likely should if they live near such a facility.

So, what's being done about it?

Dynegy's closure plans for coal ash ponds in Illinois, including the former Wood River Power Plant, are consolidation of the coal ash after removing the water, followed by covering the waste with a “cap.” The report states this practice will be ineffective for coal ash ponds without any sort of lining keeping them from leaching into the groundwater. Therefore, the report reasons, such capping measures will do little to nothing to prevent future contamination of the groundwater.

The site of the former Wood River Power Plant has initiated assessment monitoring around all four of the ash ponds. The corporation plans to close all the ash ponds in place and submitted its closure plan to the EPA in 2016. They are also currently in the process of seeking permits to discharge water from the ponds to close them. According to the report, this will not stop the “ongoing flow of dangerous contamination into groundwater and the Wood River.

A 2018 ruling by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia “significantly changed the relationship between groundwater data and unlined coal ash ponds,” the report stated. More than 90 percent of the ash ponds are unlined. The court held provisions to “continue operating unless and until monitoring reveals that the pond is polluting the groundwater do not adequately protect public health and the environment.” This ruling forces the EPA to “devise a different mechanism to protect against pollution from unlined ash ponds.”

This would mean the EPA would only be able to schedule the closure or retrofit the coal ash ponds with a protective liner.

A possible solution to this problem proposed by the authors of the report would be for the State of Illinois to regulate coal ash contamination at the site level instead of at the level of individual coal ash ponds or landfills. If groundwater does show contamination, like that around the former Wood River Power Plant, the authors suggest the owner of the site should be required to clean it up, regardless of whether or not the site is regulated by the coal ash rule.

"Illinois has the authority to go beyond the requirements of the coal ash rule, and should be required to do so," the report states. "Failure to address all sources of coal ash will fail to restore groundwater quality."

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Gizmodo: The EPA Is Now Relying on the Daily Caller to Lie About the National Climate Assessment

<https://earth.gizmodo.com/the-epa-is-now-relying-on-the-daily-caller-to-lie-about-1830739948>

Brian Kahn- Today 11:00am

The Environmental Protection Agency press shop was an abomination under Scott Pruitt. And it's not much better under Andrew Wheeler.

On Wednesday, the EPA put out a press release attempting to smear the National Climate Assessment, the landmark federal report that clearly lays out the choices the U.S. faces when it comes to climate change. It all started in the morning, when Wheeler trotted out a lie that's become now standard in the Trump administration's inept assault on the report. Speaking with the Washington Post Live, here's what he had to say:

"I wouldn't be surprised if the Obama administration told the report's authors to take a look at the worst-case scenario for this report."

This statement falls in line with talking points from the administration that have attempted to cast the report as only considering one scenario, something that is demonstrably false. Wheeler's remark was widely covered (as was his inability to name three environmental accomplishments under Trump). In an effort to back up the off-base claim, the EPA blasted out a press release "fact checking" the acting administrator's statement, using not scientific literature or planning documents to back up its claim. It went to an article by the Daily Caller News Foundation, a right-wing news site founded by Tucker Carlson and foundation largely funded by the Koch brothers. It's a well Trump's EPA has visited before.

If you read the Daily Caller report, you would find it cites a 2015 memo that says the National Climate Assessment "will focus on RCP 8.5 as a high-end scenario and RCP 4.5 as a low-end scenario." So yes, technically it is accurate to say the Obama administration asked the authors to look at the worst case scenario, just as it is also accurate to say it suggested they explore a scenario where emissions begin to decline by mid-century. But wait! There's more! The memo continues, emphasis ours:

"Other scenarios (e.g., RCP 2.6) may be used in addition where instructive, such as in analyses of mitigation issues. The use of RCPs 8.5 and RCP 4.5 as core scenarios is generally consistent with the range of emission scenarios used in the Third National Climate Assessment (NCA3). In addition, using a low-end and a high-end scenario will facilitate communications of assessment findings..."

The use of a range of future scenarios has become common in studies of the long-term implications of climate outcomes that result from different emission pathways.

The insinuation that the Obama administration only cared about a scenario where carbon emissions proceed unchecked is false. The report includes a range of scenarios that are possible to show what our choices are (and they're pretty stark).

"The Obama administration didn't push for any particular scenario, as far as I am aware," Robert Kopp, a Rutgers climate scientist who was an author on the first volume of the fourth National Climate Assessment, told Earther. "The choice of RCP 8.5 as a high-end scenario follows standard practice in the climate science community."

The EPA is choosing to ignore this information—easily available if it talked to any of the climate scientists it employed—and instead is operating like an upside-down world version of Politifact. It would laughable if the stakes weren't so high.

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The Associated Press: Trump unwilling to combat emissions at economy's expense

<https://www.dispatch.com/news/20181129/trump-unwilling-to-combat-emissions-at-economys-expense>

By Ellen Knickmeyer - Posted at 6:31 AM

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump has moved steadily to dismantle Obama administration efforts to rein in coal, oil and gas emissions, even as warnings grow — from his own administration and others — about the devastating impact of climate change on the U.S. economy as well as Earth.

Trump has dismissed his administration's warnings about the impact of climate change, including a forecast released Friday that it could lead to economic losses of hundreds of billions of dollars a year by the end of the century.

"As to whether or not it's man-made and whether or not the effects that you're talking about are there, I don't see it," he said in an interview Tuesday with The Washington Post.

Trump's position has been that efforts to combat the emissions that cause climate change have hurt the U.S. economy.

Announcing the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris global climate accord in June 2017, he said, "The Paris Climate Accord is simply the latest example of Washington entering into an agreement that disadvantages the United States to the exclusive benefit of other countries, leaving American workers — who I love — and taxpayers to absorb the cost in terms of lost jobs, lower wages, shuttered factories, and vastly diminished economic production."

An email obtained by The Associated Press under the Freedom of Information Act shows the administration withdrew from the Paris agreement with no clear climate policy in place.

"All, the purpose of this meeting is to explore whether, post Paris, we need to develop, or simply piece together from what already exists, a policy proposal that can be characterized as the "Trump climate policy," Michael Catanzaro, a former oil and gas lobbyist then serving as Trump's energy and environment consultant, wrote to White House and Environmental Protection Agency officials days after the president's announcement.

The EPA did not respond to requests for details on the meeting, or on any subsequent Trump climate policy.

In an email Wednesday, the State Department noted that the United States is still taking part in global climate talks, despite pulling out of the Paris accord.

That includes a State Department delegation to U.N. climate talks starting next week in Poland, in a follow-up to the Paris talks.

“The United States continues to participate in ongoing international climate negotiations — including those related to guidance for implementing the Paris Agreement — to ensure a level playing field that benefits the United States, its workers, and its taxpayers,” the department said in a statement.

The initial shock of the abrupt U.S. retreat from the Paris accord galvanized international support for climate efforts, said Nigel Purvis, who worked on climate issues in the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations.

It “brought other nations even closer together and they’re even more committed,” Purvis said. In the longer term, though, the Trump administration’s retreat on climate change may hurt, showing governments and companies they can flout global concerns about coal, oil and gas emissions and not be held accountable, he said.

At home, the Trump administration has initiated a rollback of a complex Obama-era effort to power the nation’s electrical grid with more renewable energy and less climate-altering coal.

“We are putting our great coal miners back to work!” Trump told a cheering crowd in West Virginia this summer, touting that rollback. Many economists challenge his claim, arguing that cheaper natural gas and other market forces will mean the continued downward slump of the U.S. coal industry.

The Obama plan had aimed at cutting U.S. emissions of climate-changing carbon dioxide by about one-third by 2030.

Separately, the country’s auto industry already is adjusting to the Trump administration’s announcement in August that it would ease Obama-era mileage standards.

Auto experts say the Trump administration’s relaxing of mileage standards will deepen American drivers’ devotion to heavier, fuel-gulping sports utility vehicles over more fuel-efficient cars.

In October, almost 65 percent of new vehicles sold in the U.S. were trucks or SUVs.

California and more than a dozen other states have sued to try to stop the relaxation of mileage standards.

In September, the Trump administration proposed relaxing 2016 rules that would have required companies to do more to detect and plug methane leaks at oil and gas installations.

Methane is the primary component of natural gas, and one of the most-potent pollutants when it comes to trapping heat in the atmosphere.

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U.S. News & World Report: EPA Lifts Advanced Biofuel Mandate for 2019, Keeps Ethanol Steady – Document

<https://money.usnews.com/investing/news/articles/2018-11-29/exclusive-epa-lifts-advanced-biofuel-mandate-for-2019-keeps-ethanol-steady-document>

BY HUMEYRA PAMUK- Nov. 29, 2018, at 2:04 p.m.

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lifted its annual blending mandate for advanced biofuels by 15 percent for 2019, while keeping the requirement for conventional biofuels like corn-based ethanol steady, according to an agency document seen by Reuters on Thursday.

The mandate includes 4.92 billion gallons for advanced biofuels which can be made from plant and animal waste, a figure that is up from the EPA's initial proposal in June of 4.88 billion and above the 4.29 billion that had been set for 2018, according to the document.

The requirement for conventional biofuels, meanwhile, remains at 15 billion gallons for 2019, on par with 2018, and the same as proposed by the agency in June.

The EPA is required to formally announce the biofuel mandate figures, which are closely watched by the rival corn and oil industries, by Friday.

Under the U.S. Renewable Fuel Standard, first adopted in 2005, oil refiners are required to blend a certain amount of biofuels, as determined by the EPA, into their fuel each year or purchase blending credits from those that do.

The policy has helped farmers by creating a huge market for ethanol and other biofuels, but oil refiners say that complying can cost them a fortune.

The new figures confirm the agency has declined requests by the corn industry to reallocate biofuel blending obligations previously waived under the small refinery exemptions program, which has been expanded dramatically under the administration of President Donald Trump.

Small refineries can be exempted from the RFS if they prove that complying would cause them financial strain.

The powerful corn lobby and top officials in the U.S. Department of Agriculture have complained for months that the expansion of the waiver program since Trump took office threatens demand for ethanol.

An EPA official told Reuters earlier this week the decision not to reallocate waived volumes was due mainly to timing.

"The primary reason why we're not reallocating in this rule is because we have no idea what the volume of SREs (Small Refinery Exemptions) will be for calendar 2019 and we won't know that late 2019, early 2020. All we could do is guess, and we don't do regulations by guessing here," the official said.

The Trump administration has also temporarily put on hold processing of current waiver applications as the EPA and the Department of Energy review the scoring system used to evaluate them, sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

EPA is still expected to rule on current applications, however, before the March 31 compliance deadline for the 2018 calendar year.

Trump has sought to please the corn lobby with a different tweak to U.S. biofuel policy: in October he directed the EPA to draft a rule allowing year-round sales of higher ethanol gasoline blends called E15 - a product restricted during the summer over concerns it contributes to smog.

In an interview with Reuters, Bill Wehrum, assistant administrator at EPA's Air and Radiation Department, said the agency was on track to finalize the rule before June 1, in time for 2019 driving season.

"We will get it by done," Wehrum said, adding that they were prepared to be sued over the rule. "I think there's a virtual certainty that we're going to get challenged in court. I think we gave a good legal argument," he added.

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Huffingtonpost: Trump Administration May Reshape Next Federal Climate Report: EPA Chief

The EPA's Andrew Wheeler said he "wouldn't be surprised if the Obama administration told the report's authors to take a look at the worst case scenario."

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-administration-wheeler-climate-change-study_us_5bfeebcde4b0388c1770ce67

By Sara Boboltz and Alexander C. Kaufman- November 28, 2018

Environmental Protection Agency acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler said Wednesday that the Trump administration may step in to change the way the government drafts its next National Climate Assessment.

The suggestion that politicians might influence a report from more 300 federal scientists at 13 agencies came at an event in Washington, where reporters pressed the agency chief on the authors' dire projections about devastating climate change.

Speaking at a Washington Post Live event, Wheeler accused former President Barack Obama of telling "the report's authors to take a look at the worst-case scenario for this report."

"Going forward, I think we need to take a look at the modeling that's used for the next assessment," Wheeler said.

It's an audacious set of statements from the acting EPA administrator, who until last year served as a top coal lobbyist and espouses the industry's scientifically unsound stance that the link between fossil fuels and climate change remains dubious.

The remarks follow a clear, cynical pattern among those who deny climate science, accusing scientists and researchers of bias.

The announcement is concerning in light of a previous incident of political interference. In 2005, Philip Clooney, a former oil lobbyist working for the George W. Bush administration, was caught altering language in climate science reports to weaken the link between fossil fuels and rising global temperatures.

What Wheeler appeared to suggest Wednesday goes beyond that. He said the administration could take a dangerously optimistic route by developing what the EPA chief called "more realistic projections" incorporating future advancements in "technology and innovation."

He also said the National Climate Assessment was based on overly pessimistic and outdated models used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the leading United Nations' research body on global warming.

This New World

The current capitalist system is broken. Get updates on our progress toward building a fairer world.

By contrast, the IPCC warned in October that world governments must halve emissions over the next 12 years to avert catastrophic climate change costing \$54 trillion. That cost could, in fact, be on the conservative side, according to a

study published in June that found the IPCC relied on economic models that failed to grasp the magnitude of global warming.

Trump, who rejects climate science outright, dismissed the IPCC's report in October and said he does not believe the results of the latest federal study.

Wheeler put a friendlier face on the administration's climate change denial after he took over in July following disgraced and scandal-plagued Administrator Scott Pruitt's resignation. He halted some of the EPA's antagonism of the press and spoke in dry legalese when deploying the same unscientific industry propaganda Pruitt used to justify his doubt over the causes of climate change. But he is pursuing the same aggressive rollback of climate regulations.

In August, Wheeler proposed dramatically weakening fuel economy standards, clearing the way for vehicles — the nation's No. 1 source of climate pollution — to spew an addition 600 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere by 2030. Weeks later, he moved to gut a signature Obama-era rule on power plant pollution — allowing for increased pollution that could cause 1,400 premature deaths per year.

Officials at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, one of the 13 agencies behind the National Climate Assessment, said no political appointees interfered with the contents of the report. But Wheeler has a history of attempting to change the way the federal government analyzes pollution.

In October, he fired a panel of scientific experts responsible for helping the EPA's review of air quality standards for particulate matter, an issue that has long dogged the coal industry for which the agency chief previously lobbied.

Later that month, Wheeler said he'd delay a decision on how to move forward on the EPA's controversial "transparency" rule, a proposal that would bar the agency from using critical epidemiological studies when drafting regulations, until next year.

Wheeler once again punted on difficult questions on Wednesday, despite criticizing the nature of the report.

"I haven't read the entire report yet, but I've gone through it," he said, adding that he wants to "follow up" on the projection modeling methods.

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Mashable: The EPA has lost its mind

<https://www.yahoo.com/news/epa-lost-mind-211448085.html>

Mark Kaufman • November 29, 2018

There's something truly out of place amid a slew of uneventful news releases on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) website: Six bizarre sentences, accusing the Obama Administration of distorting climate science.

Posted to the federal agency's site on Wednesday, the brief missive contends that Obama's scientists improperly influenced the new congressionally-mandated National Climate Assessment by focusing on the "worst-case scenario" for climate change this century.

The release, which cited as its corroborating evidence an article from the conservative website The Daily Caller, promotes a profoundly misleading, oversimplified, and politicized view of the climate report, which involved the work of 13 government agencies and 300 climate scientists.

The decision to publish this as an official release — from the chief office of a government agency responsible for the nation's environmental oversight — is rash, and problematic, at best.

"For the EPA's political leadership to do this is, one might say, deplorable," Joe Goffman, a former EPA senior counsel in the Office of Air and Radiation, said in an interview.

"They've done something really flagrant as part of the campaign to foster misinformation to the public about climate science," Goffman, now the executive director of Harvard Law School's Environmental Law Program, added. "I would argue they committed a genuinely cardinal sin with respect to the values of scientific integrity and the trustworthiness they owe the public."

Just how flagrantly misinformed is the EPA's release?

The current incarnation of the EPA is claiming that President Barack Obama's science advisor and current Harvard professor, John Holdren, used a routine May 2015 memo to instruct the report's scientists to focus on the "worst case" climate scenario, meaning the continued release of high amounts of greenhouse gases over the coming decades.

The Climate Assessment, however, considered a variety of scenarios about the future climate based upon different carbon emission possibilities — just as it has in the past.

The highest, or "worst-case," is if trends continue as they are, allowing for historically unprecedented amounts of heat-trapping greenhouse gases to accumulate in the atmosphere. This scenario is formally called "RCP 8.5." The other major scenarios, contingent upon a lowering of greenhouse gas emissions, are RCP 6.0, 4.5 and 2.6 (with 2.6 being the lowest).

In the last two national climate assessments (2014 and 2018), scientists chose RCP 4.5 and 8.5 scenarios as the main, or most likely, based upon the amount of greenhouse gas emissions being expelled into the air — but it certainly did not ignore the lowest possibility (RCP 2.6). In fact, 4.5 is a low-end scenario, too.

"Wow, this EPA press release really is the express train to crazy town," Andrew Dessler, a professor of atmospheric sciences at Texas A&M University, said over email.

"What The Daily Caller and EPA clearly want readers to think is that Holdren told the assessment team to look ONLY at the worst case scenario. That's obviously false."

What's more, the lowest of the low emissions scenario, RCP 2.6, is growing increasingly unlikely. Meeting that would require net-zero greenhouse gas emissions globally in the second half of this century, Bob Kopp, Director of the Institute of Earth, Ocean, and Atmospheric Sciences at Rutgers University, explained over email.

That's "more ambitious than current policy, and in the opposite direction from that which current federal policy is taking us," Kopp said.

As it is, "RCP 4.5 requires substantial mitigation policy to achieve," noted Kopp. And, critically, we are now on a track for the higher-end, worst-case scenario — whether EPA leadership wishes to accept the data or not.

"Historical CO2 emissions have been closer to RCP 8.5 than to any other scenario," said Kopp.

Where we're ultimately headed may be the worst-case scenario, or fall somewhere in between RCP 8.5 and 4.5. That's why the climate assessment considered a range of possibilities — which is what Holdren recommended.

There's simply no deception, nor ploy here.

"This is a standard and common-sense approach —because we don't know what path emissions will follow, you try to estimate what's the best case and worst-case and assume that reality will fall somewhere in between them," said Dessler. "That's what the memo says to do and that's what the assessment did and that seems completely reasonable to me."

This makes the EPA's news release all the more bizarre. It appears as if it's coming from a whimsical social media post, or a pundit with an animosity towards Obama, or Obama's environmental policy.

"This is an official statement of the U.S. EPA," noted Goffman. "Here you have the government doing something that's affirmatively misleading."

For nearly two years now, the EPA has made efforts to both hide information about and mislead the public about the truth behind climate science.

The agency has completely eliminated its climate change webpages, and in March sent its staff "talking points" on how to speak about climate research — encouraging scientists to emphasize any uncertainties in the science.

The latest U.S. Climate Assessment lays out how every portion of the U.S. will be impacted by climate change under the likely emissions scenarios.

"The impacts of climate change are already being felt in communities across the country," the report reads. "More frequent and intense extreme weather and climate-related events, as well as changes in average climate conditions, are expected to continue to damage infrastructure, ecosystems, and social systems that provide essential benefits to communities."

The EPA's chief, former coal lobbyist Andrew Wheeler, has publicly questioned the report, though he hasn't finished reviewing it.

President Donald Trump simply dismisses both the report and climate science that is agreed upon by scientists globally. The EPA's release — which includes a picture of Obama and Holdren — is blatantly an attempt to promote the Trump Administration's denial of accumulating climate science... but a sloppy one.

"I think the transparently misleading nature of this [EPA] argument underscores how few legitimate arguments the Administration has against this powerful report," said Dessler.

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Sludge: State Propaganda: EPA Cites Koch-Funded Article to Attack Climate Report

The energy editor of the Charles Koch-funded Daily Caller owes his career to the conservative billionaire industrialist.

<https://readsludge.com/2018/11/29/state-propaganda-epa-cites-koch-funded-article-to-attack-climate-report/>

Alex Kotch- PUBLISHED ON NOV 29, 2018 4:03PM EST

While still in college, Daily Caller energy editor Michael Bastasch began a career heavily financed by the billionaire Charles Koch, CEO of the fossil fuels, chemicals and materials conglomerate Koch Industries.

Several years later, Koch's investments appear to be paying off: In a Wednesday press release, the Environmental Protection Agency attacked the Trump administration's own grave climate assessment by citing a Bastasch article published that day. This Daily Caller piece amplified EPA Acting Director Andrew Wheeler's inaccurate speculation that

former President Barack Obama directed climate scientists at the White House National Science and Technology Council to focus its National Climate Assessment on worst-case scenarios.

The recently released National Climate Assessment, the product of more than four years of work by hundreds of scientists from 13 government agencies, predicts a deadly and costly climate catastrophe unless the United States takes drastic measures immediately. How the government reacts to this assessment will likely impact Koch Industries' bottom line, since any meaningful greenhouse gas reduction plan will involve a significant decrease in fossil fuel production.

The EPA's press release, billed as a "fact check," quotes and links to the Daily Caller piece. Instead of consulting outside experts to fact check its own administration's climate report, the EPA relied on one Koch-funded journalist.

Trump's EPA head wants nothing to do with the big new climate report
"I have questions about the assumptions."

A Koch-Funded Career

During the fall semester of 2010, while a college student, Bastasch was an intern at the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a corporate bill mill that unites business lobbyists and state lawmakers who together craft conservative model legislation. Koch nonprofits have funded ALEC for some time and increased their sponsorship of the organization in 2017.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Bastasch scored a Koch-sponsored fellowship in summer 2011 from the Institute for Humane Studies, an on-campus free-market think tank at George Mason University. The fellowship appears to have funded Bastasch's work as a research associate at the Cascade Policy Institute, an anti-environmental think tank in Oregon. That fall, Bastasch was a government affairs intern at the climate change-denying Heritage Foundation, which is partially funded by the Charles Koch Foundation (CKF).

In 2012, Bastasch was part of an internship program funded by the Charles Koch Institute, another 501(c)(3) nonprofit. He joined the Daily Caller News Foundation (DCNF) in January as a researcher while wrapping up his internship at the Heritage Foundation. Bastasch became a DCNF reporter that June, and he's been there ever since.

As Sludge recently reported, CKF has been a major funder of DCNF, which provides much of the content published on The Daily Caller website. In 2016, CKF and the Charles Koch Institute combined to donate nearly \$950,000 to DCNF—83 percent of its revenue that year. In 2017, per a new tax document, the Koch nonprofits increased their DCNF funding by roughly \$20,000. CKF told Washington Post opinion writer Radley Balko—who previously worked at Reason, a libertarian publication partially funded by CKF—that its donations to DCNF fund fellowships for reporters with the intent "to create an incubator for young journalists with a free market bent, and to move them into mainstream journalism."

As HuffPost environmental reporter Alexander Kaufman pointed out on Twitter, Bastasch, who has been employed by DCNF for nearly seven years, published numerous articles this year defending disgraced then-EPA director Scott Pruitt.

"Make no mistake: Working for the Daily Caller is an evolution of his career as a Koch operative," wrote Kaufman.

Earthier reporter Brian Kahn explained falsehoods uttered on Tuesday by White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders, claims that were echoed by the EPA the next day. "This report is based on the most extreme model scenario, which contradicts long-established trends," claimed Sanders.

In reality, the climate assessment was based on a range of future possibilities, including worst-case and numerous other scenarios, as is the custom in these reports. The world is heading towards a worst-case scenario, many climate reports project, and including an analysis of that potential outcome is extremely important, writes Kahn.

Wheeler, a former coal industry lobbyist who has questioned the link between fossil fuels and climate change, may use this seemingly manufactured criticism of the National Climate Assessment to help manipulate how the next assessment is drafted, reported Kaufman and Sara Boboltz.

The Kochtopus

Koch has helmed Koch Industries, a network of companies that operate oil refineries and gas pipelines and produces chemicals, fertilizers and paper products, for decades. The corporate behemoth, which took in over \$110 billion in revenue last year, is among the nation's biggest polluters, having racked up hundreds of millions of dollars in fines for violating environmental and other regulations.

Koch, a conservative libertarian billionaire, also manages a huge rightwing political operation to churn out research attacking regulations and taxes, mobilize advocacy groups around these issues, and elect Republican politicians who largely legislate in lockstep with his ideology. Until a recent illness, Koch's brother, David, was involved in leading Koch Industries and the political network as well.

Connor Gibson, a Greenpeace researcher and co-founder of the activist group UnKoch My Campus, elaborated on this political pipeline for Sludge. "Koch's strategy is to own the policy conversations that affect his wealth...The politicians he funds are armed with research published by Koch professors and broadcast by Koch media outlets. This is how Mr. Koch is advancing protections for white collar criminals, fending off anti-pollution regulations and keeping his taxes lower than the rest of ours."

While the Kochs portray themselves as having strong disagreements with President Donald Trump, their business has benefited enormously from the Trump administration's removal of key environmental regulations, support for the giant tax cut of 2017, and installation of numerous business-friendly judges. Trump recently said he doesn't believe the findings of the new climate assessment.

The appointment of Wheeler as acting director of the EPA surely came as welcome news to the Koch family. Now the agency is promoting the work of an anti-environmental writer who owes his career to its most powerful member.

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The Hill: EPA to boost mandate for some biofuels: report

<https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/418958-epa-to-boost-mandate-for-some-biofuels-report>

BY TIMOTHY CAMA - 11/29/18 03:02 PM EST

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is planning to increase the federal mandate for certain biofuels.

The mandate for fuel refiners to use advanced biofuels, which can be made from waste products such as woody biomass, is going up to 4.92 billion gallons, a 15 percent increase from the current year, in an EPA regulation covering 2019 that is set to be released Friday, Reuters reported.

But the overall ethanol mandate — which can be fulfilled using fuels made from corn, soy and many other sources — will stay at 15 billion gallons, the same level as 2018, Reuters reported, citing an agency document.

The Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS) requires oil refiners making gasoline and diesel to blend certain amounts of biofuels into the products they sell or to buy credits from other companies to demonstrate compliance.

The EPA is also set to decline requests from the corn industry to make up for hardship exemptions it gave to numerous small refineries by reallocating those refineries' obligations across the overall industry.

An EPA official told Reuters that in order to reallocate the volumes, the agency would have to predict how many waivers it would give in 2019 and then adjust the mandate accordingly.

The EPA did not immediately return a request for comment from The Hill on the Reuters report.

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Reuters: Exclusive: EPA lifts advanced biofuel mandate for 2019, keeps ethanol steady – document

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-biofuels-exclusive/exclusive-epa-lifts-advanced-biofuel-mandate-for-2019-keeps-ethanol-steady-document-idUSKCN1NY2HQ>

Humeyra Pamuk- November 29, 2018

WASHINGTON- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lifted its annual blending mandate for advanced biofuels by 15 percent for 2019, while keeping the requirement for conventional biofuels like corn-based ethanol steady, according to an agency document seen by Reuters on Thursday.

FILE PHOTO - An empty podium awaits the arrival of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Acting Administrator Andrew Wheeler to address staff at EPA headquarters in Washington, U.S., July 11, 2018. REUTERS/Ting Shen
The mandate includes 4.92 billion gallons for advanced biofuels which can be made from plant and animal waste, a figure that is up from the EPA's initial proposal in June of 4.88 billion and above the 4.29 billion that had been set for 2018, according to the document.

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